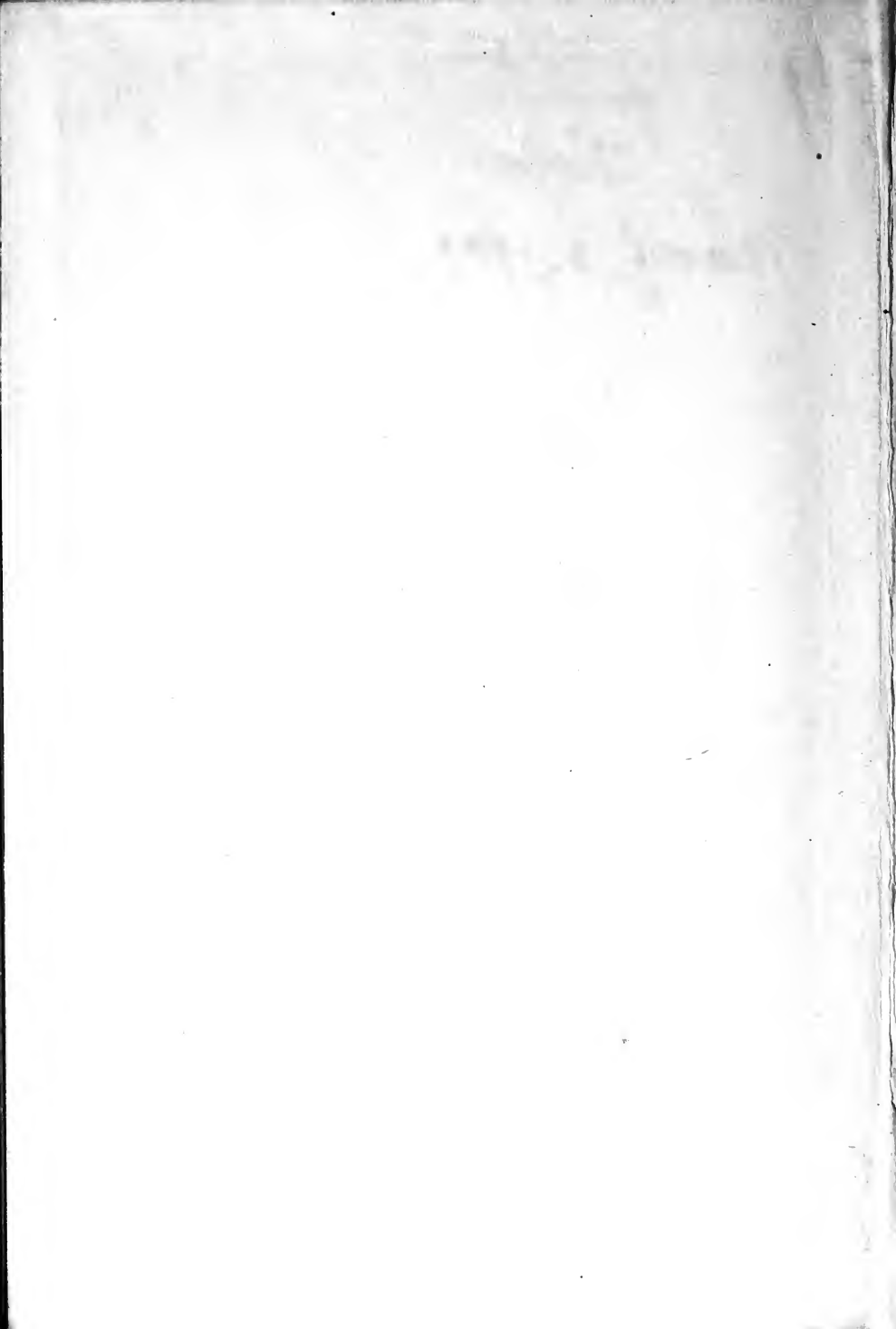


HEARTS & MASKS

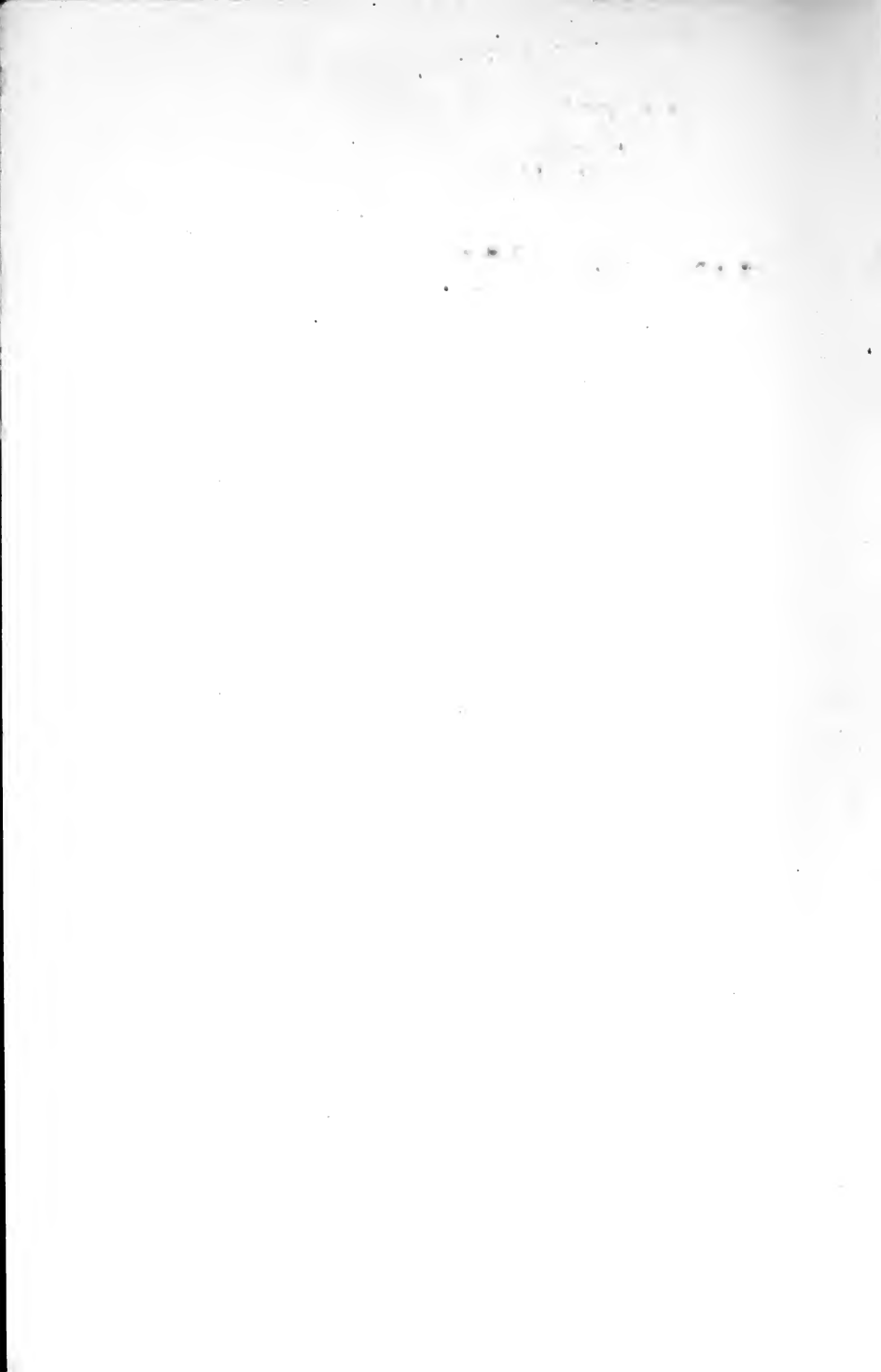


HAROLD MACGRATH



To Dorothea
from
Viola.

March, 2, 1907.



HEARTS & MASKS





HEARTS AND MASKS

BY

HAROLD MAC GRATH

Author of *The Puppet Crown*
The Grey Cloak *The Man on the Box*

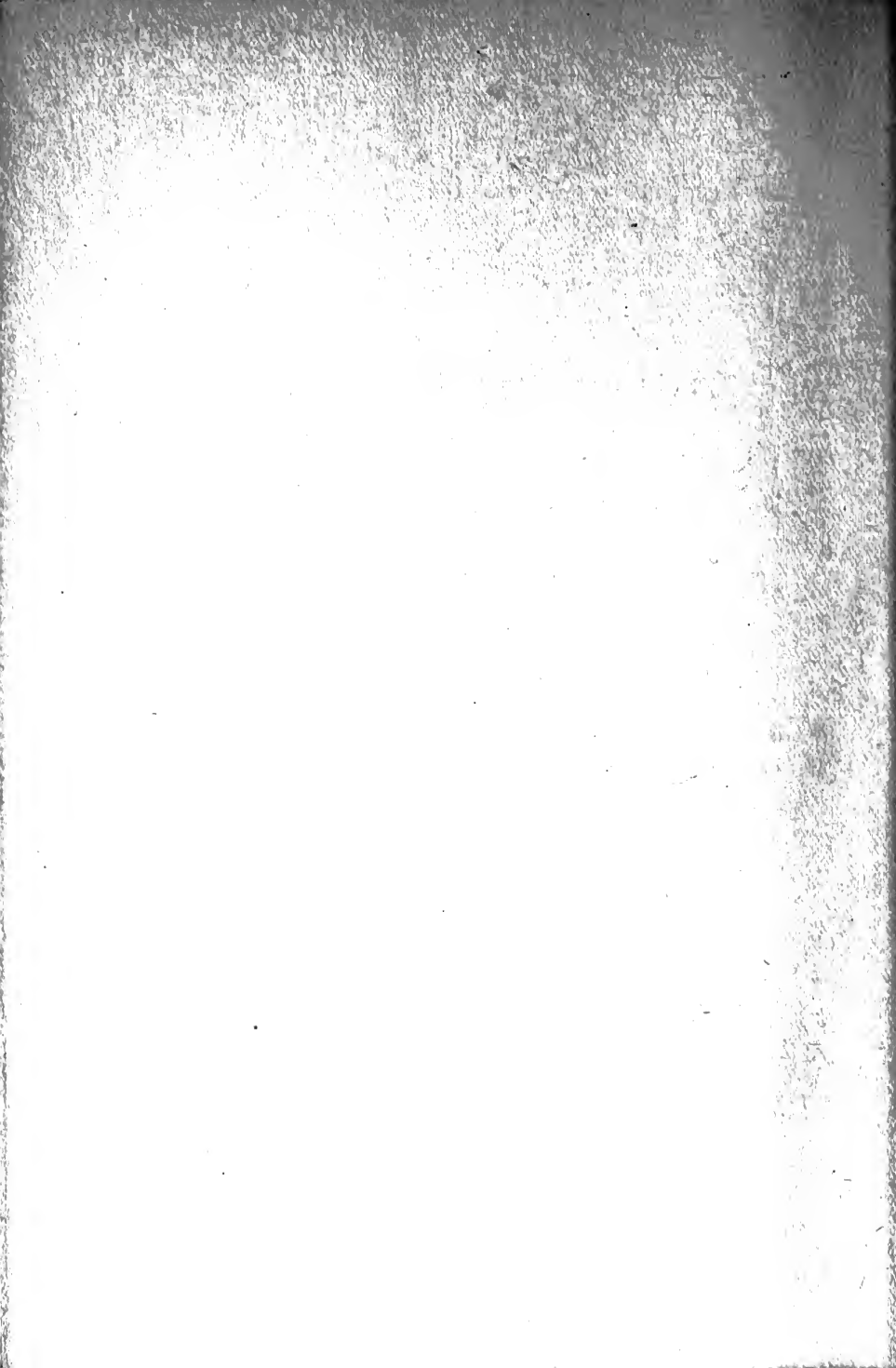
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HARRISON FISHER



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TO MY WIFE



HEARTS AND MASKS

I

It all depends upon the manner of your entrance to the Castle of Adventure. One does not have to scale its beetling parapets or assault its scarps and frowning bastions; neither is one obliged to force with clamor and blaring trumpets and glittering gorgets the drawbridge and portcullis. Rather the pathway lies through one of those many little doors, obscure, yet easily accessible, latchless and boltless, to which the average person gives no particular attention, and yet which invariably lead to the very heart of this Castle Delectable. The whimsical chatelaine of this enchanted keep is a shy goddess. Circumspection has no part in her affairs, nor caution, nor practicality; nor does her eye linger upon the dullard and the blunderer. Imagination solves the secret riddle, and wit is the guide that leads

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the seeker through the winding, bewildering labyrinths.

And there is something in being idle, too!

If I had not gone idly into Mouquin's cellar for dinner that night, I should have missed the most engaging adventure that ever fell to my lot. It is second nature for me to be guided by impulse rather than by reason; reason is always so square-toed and impulse is always so alluring. You will find that nearly all the great captains were and are creatures of impulse; nothing brilliant is ever achieved by calculation. All this is not to say that I am a great captain; it is offered only to inform you that I am often impulsive.

A *Times*, four days old; and if I hadn't fallen upon it to pass the twenty-odd minutes between my order and the service of it, I shouldn't have made the acquaintance of the police in that pretty little suburb over in New Jersey; nor should I have met the enchanting Blue Domino; nor would fate have written Kismet. The clairvoyant never has any fun in this cycle; he has no surprises.

I had been away from New York for several weeks, and had returned only that afternoon. Thus, the spirit of unrest acquired by travel was

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still upon me. It was nearing holiday week, and those congenial friends I might have called upon, to while away the evening, were either busily occupied with shopping or were out of town; and I determined not to go to the club and be bored by some indifferent billiard player. I would dine quietly, listen to some light music, and then go to the theater. I was searching the theatrical amusements, when the society column indifferently attacked my eye. I do not know why it is, but I have a wholesome contempt for the so-called society columns of the daily newspaper in New York. Mayhap, it is because I do not belong.

I read this paragraph with a shrug, and that one with a smirk. I was in no manner surprised at the announcement that Miss High-Culture was going to wed the Duke of Impecune; I had always been certain this girl would do some such fool thing. That Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds was giving a farewell dinner at the Waldorf, prior to her departure to Europe, interested my curiosity not in the least degree. It would be all the same to me if she never came back. None of the wishy-washy tittle-tattle interested me, in fact. There was only one little six-line paragraph that really

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caught me. On Friday night (that is to say, the night of my adventures in Blankshire), the Hunt Club was to give a charity masquerade dance. This grasped my adventurous spirit by the throat and refused to let go.

The atmosphere surrounding the paragraph was spirituous with enchantment. There was a genuine novelty about this dance. Two packs of playing-cards had been sent out as tickets; one pack to the ladies and one to the gentlemen. Charming idea, wasn't it? These cards were to be shown at the door, together with ten dollars, but were to be retained by the recipients till two o'clock (supper-time), at which moment everybody was to unmask and take his partner, who held the corresponding card, in to supper. Its newness strongly appealed to me. I found myself reading the paragraph over and over.

By Jove, what an inspiration!

I knew the Blankshire Hunt Club, with its colonial architecture, its great ball-room, its quaint fireplaces, its stables and sheds, and the fame of its chef. It was one of those great country clubs that keep open house the year round. It stood back from the sea about four miles and

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was within five miles of the village. There was a fine course inland, a cross-country going of not less than twenty miles, a shooting-box, and excellent golf-links. In the winter it was cozy; in the summer it was ideal.

I was intimately acquainted with the club's M. F. H., Teddy Hamilton. We had done the Paris-Berlin run in my racing-car the summer before. If I hadn't known him so well, I might still have been in durance vile, next door to jail, or securely inside. I had frequently dined with him at the club during the summer, and he had offered to put me up; but as I knew no one intimately but himself, I explained the futility of such action. Besides, my horse wasn't a hunter; and I was riding him less and less. It is no pleasure to go "parking" along the bridle-paths of Central Park. For myself, I want a hill country and something like forty miles, straight away; that's riding.

The fact that I knew no one but Teddy added zest to the inspiration which had seized me. For I determined to attend that dance, happen what might. It would be vastly more entertaining than a possibly dull theatrical performance. (It was!)

I called for a messenger and despatched him to

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the nearest drug store for a pack of playing-cards; and while I waited for his return I casually glanced at the other diners. At my table — one of those long marble-topped affairs by the wall — there was an old man reading a paper, and the handsomest girl I had set eyes upon in a month of moons. Sometimes the word handsome seems an inferior adjective. She was beautiful, and her half-lidded eyes told me that she was anywhere but at Mouquin's. What a head of hair! Fine as a spider's web, and the dazzling yellow of a wheat-field in a sun-shower! The irregularity of her features made them all the more interesting. I was an artist in an amateur way, and I mentally painted in that head against a Rubens background. The return of the messenger brought me back to earth; for I confess that my imagination had already leaped far into the future, and this girl across the way was nebulously connected with it.

I took the pack of cards, ripped off the covering, tossed aside the joker (though, really, I ought to have retained it!) and began shuffling the shiny pasteboards. I dare say that those around me sat up and took notice. It was by no means a common sight to see a man gravely shuffling a pack of

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cards in a public restaurant. Nobody interfered, doubtless because nobody knew exactly what to do in the face of such an act, for which no adequate laws had been provided. A waiter stood solemnly at the end of the table, scratching his chin thoughtfully, wondering whether he should report this peculiarity of constitution and susceptibility occasioning certain peculiarities of effect from impress of extraneous influences (*vide* Webster), synonymous with idiocrasy and known as idiosyncrasy. It was quite possible that I was the first man to establish such a precedent in Monsieur Mouquin's restaurant. Thus, I aroused only passive curiosity.

From the corner of my eye I observed the old gentleman opposite. He was peering over the top of his paper, and I could see by the glitter in his eye that he was a confirmed player of solitaire. The girl, however, still appeared to be in a dreaming state. I have no doubt every one who saw me thought that anarchy was abroad again, or that Sherlock Holmes had entered into his third incarnation.

Finally I squared the pack, took a long breath, and cut. I turned up the card. It was the ten-

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spot of hearts. I considered this most propitious, hearts being my long suit in everything but love, — love having not yet crossed my path. I put the card in my wallet, and was about to toss the rest of the pack under the table, when a woman's voice stayed my hand.

"Don't throw them away. Tell my fortune first."

I looked up, not a little surprised. It was the beautiful young girl who had spoken. She was leaning on her elbows, her chin propped in her palms, and the light in her grey *chatoyant* eyes was wholly innocent and mischievous. In Monsieur Mouquin's cellar people are rather Bohemian, not to say friendly; for it is the rendezvous of artists, literary men and journalists, — a clan that holds formality in contempt.

"Tell your fortune?" I repeated parrot-like.

"Yes."

"Your mirror can tell you that more accurately than I can," I replied with a frank glance of admiration.

She drew her shoulders together and dropped them. "I spoke to you, sir, because I believed you wouldn't say anything so commonplace as that.

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When one sees a man soberly shuffling a pack of cards in a place like this, one naturally expects originality."

"Well, perhaps you caught me off my guard,"—humbly. "I am original. Did you ever before witness this performance in a public restaurant?"—making the cards purr.

"I can not say I have,"—amused.

"Well, no more have I!"

"Why, then, do you do it?"—with renewed interest.

"Shall I tell your fortune?"

"Not now. I had much rather you would tell me the meaning of this play."

I leaned toward her and whispered mysteriously: "The truth is, I belong to a secret society, and I was cutting the cards to see whether or not I should blow up the post-office to-night or the police-station. You mustn't tell anybody."

"Oh!" She started back from the table.

"You do not look it," she added suddenly.

"I know it; appearances are so deceptive," said I sadly.

Then the old man laughed, and the girl laughed, and I laughed; and I wasn't quite sure that the

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grave waiter did not crack the ghost of a smile — in relief.

“And what, may I ask, was the fatal card?” inquired the old man, folding his paper.

“The ace of spades; we always choose that gloomy card in secret societies. There is something deadly and suggestive about it,” I answered morbidly.

“Indeed.”

“Yes. Ah, if only you knew the terrible life we lead, we who conspire! Every day brings forth some galling disappointment. We push a king off into the dark, and another rises immediately in his place. Futility, futility everywhere! If only there were some way of dynamiting habit and custom! I am a Russian; all my family are perishing in Siberian mines,”—dismally.

“Fudge!” said the girl.

“Tommy-rot!” said the amiable old gentleman.

“Uncle, his hair is too short for an anarchist.”

“And his collar too immaculate.” (So the old gentleman was this charming creature’s uncle!)

“We are obliged to disguise ourselves at times,” I explained. “The police are always meddling. It is discouraging.”





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"You have some purpose, humorous or serious," said the girl shrewdly. "A man does not bring a pack of cards —"

"I didn't bring them; I sent out for them."

"— bring a pack of cards here simply to attract attention," she continued tranquilly.

"Perhaps I am a prestidigitator in a popular dime-museum," I suggested, willing to help her out, "and am doing a little advertising."

"Now, that has a plausible sound," she admitted, folding her hands under her chin. "It must be an interesting life. *Presto — change!* and all that."

"Oh, I find it rather monotonous in the winter; but in the summer it is fine. Then I wander about the summer resorts and give exhibitions."

"You will pardon my niece," interpolated the old gentleman, coughing a bit nervously. "If she annoys you —"

"Uncle!"— reproachfully.

"Heaven forfend!" I exclaimed eagerly. "There is a charm in doing unconventional things; and most people do not realize it, and are stupid."

"Thank you, sir," said the girl, smiling. She was evidently enjoying herself; so was I, for that

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matter. "Do a trick for me," she commanded presently.

I smiled weakly. I couldn't have done a trick with the cards,—not if my life had depended upon it. But I rather neatly extricated myself from the trap.

"I never do any tricks out of business hours."

"Uncle, give the gentleman ten cents; I want to see him do a sleight-of-hand trick."

Her uncle, readily entering into the spirit of the affair, dived into a pocket and produced the piece of silver. It looked as if I were caught.

"There! this may make it worth your while," the girl said, shoving the coin in my direction.

But again I managed to slide under; I was not to be caught.

"It is my regret to say,"—frowning slightly, "that regularity in my business is everything. It wants half an hour for my turn to come on. If I tried a trick out of turn, I might fizzle and lose prestige. And besides, I depend so much upon the professor and his introductory notes: 'Ladies *and* gents, permit me to introduce the world-renowned Signor Fantoccini, whose marvelous tricks have long puzzled all the crowned heads of Europe —'"

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"Fantoccini,"—musingly. "That's Italian for puppet show."

"I know it, but the dime-museum visitors do not. It makes a fine impression."

She laughed and slid the dime back to her uncle.

"I'm afraid you are an impostor," she said.

"I'm afraid so, too," I confessed, laughing.

Then the comedy came to an end by the appearance of our separate orders. I threw aside the cards and proceeded to attack my dinner, for I was hungry. From time to time I caught vague fragments of conversation between the girl and her uncle.

"It's a fool idea," mumbled the old gentleman; "you will get into some trouble or other."

"That doesn't matter. It will be like a vacation,—a flash of old Rome, where I wish I were at this very moment. I am determined."

"This is what comes of reading romantic novels,"—with a kind of grumble.

"I admit there never was a particle of romance on your side of the family," the girl retorted.

"Happily. There is peace in the house where I live."

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"Do not argue with me."

"I am not arguing with you. I should only be wasting my time. I am simply warning you that you are about to commit a folly."

"I have made up my mind."

"Ah! In that case I have hopes," he returned. "When a woman makes up her mind to do one thing, she generally does another. Why can't you put aside this fool idea and go to the opera with me?"

"I have seen *Carmen* in Paris, Rome, London and New York," she replied.

(Evidently a traveled young person.)

"*Carmen* is your favorite opera, besides."

"Not to-night,"—whimsically.

"Go, then; but please recollect that if anything serious comes of your folly, I did my best to prevent it. It's a scatter-brained idea, and no good will come of it, mark me."

"I can take care of myself,"—truculently.

"So I have often been forced to observe,"—dryly.

(I wondered what it was all about.)

"But, uncle dear, I am becoming so dreadfully bored!"

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"That sounds final," sighed the old man, helping himself to the *haricots verts*. (The girl ate positively nothing.) "But it seems odd that you can't go about your affairs after my own reasonable manner."

"I am only twenty."

The old man's shoulders rose and fell resignedly.

"No man has an answer for that."

"I promise to tell you everything that happens; by telegraph."

"That's small comfort. Imagine receiving a telegram early in the morning, when a man's brain is without invention or coherency of thought! I would that you were back home with your father. I might sleep o' nights, then."

"I have so little amusement!"

"You work three hours a day and earn more in a week than your father and I do in a month. Yours is a very unhappy lot."

"I hate the smell of paints; I hate the studio."

"And I suppose you hate your fame?" acridly.

"Bah! that is my card to a living. The people I meet bore me."

"Not satisfied with common folks, eh? Must have kings and queens to talk to?"

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"I only want to live abroad, and you and father will not let me,"—petulantly.

The music started up, and I heard no more. Occasionally the girl glanced at me and smiled in a friendly fashion. She was evidently an artist's model; and when they have hair and color like this girl's, the pay is good. I found myself wondering why she was bored and why *Carmen* had so suddenly lost its charms.

It was seven o'clock when I pushed aside my plate and paid my check. I calculated that by hustling I could reach Blankshire either at ten or ten-thirty. That would be early enough for my needs. And now to route out a costumer. All I needed was a grey mask. I had in my apartments a Capuchin's robe and cowl. I rose, lighting a cigarette.

The girl looked up from her coffee.

"Back to the dime-museum?"—banteringly.

"I have a few minutes to spare," said I.

"By the way, I forgot to ask you what card you drew."

"It was the ten of hearts."

"The ten of hearts?" Her amazement was not understandable.

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"Yes, the ten of hearts; Cupid and all that."

She recovered her composure quickly.

"Then you will not blow up the post-office to-night?"

"No," I replied, "not to-night."

"You have really and truly aroused my curiosity. Tell me, what does the ten of hearts mean to you?"

I gazed thoughtfully down at her. Had I truly mystified her? There was some doubt in my mind.

"Frankly, I wish I might tell you. All I am at liberty to say is that I am about to set forth upon a desperate adventure, and I shall be very fortunate if I do not spend the night in the lock-up."

"You do not look desperate."

"Oh, I am not desperate; it is only the adventure that is desperate."

"Some princess in durance vile? Some villain to smite? Citadels to storm?" Her smile was enchantment itself.

I hesitated a moment. "What would you say if I told you that this adventure was merely to

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prove to myself what a consummate ass the average man can be upon occasions?"

"Why go to the trouble of proving it?"—lrolly.

"I am conceited enough to have some doubts as to the degree."

"Consider it positive."

I laughed. "I am in hopes that I am neither a positive ass nor a superlative one, only comparative."

"But the adventure; that is the thing that mainly interests me."

"Oh, that is a secret which I should hesitate to tell even to the Sphinx."

"I see you are determined not to illuminate the darkness,"—and she turned carelessly toward her uncle, who was serenely contemplating the glowing end of a fat perfecto.

I bowed and passed out in Sixth Avenue, rather regretting that I had not the pleasure of the charming young person's acquaintance.

The ten-spot of hearts seemed to have startled her for some reason. I wondered why.

The snow blew about me, whirled, and swirled, and stung. Oddly enough I recalled the paragraph

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relative to Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds. By this time she was being very well tossed about in mid-ocean. As the old order of yarn-spinners used to say, little did I dream what was in store for me, or the influence the magic name of Hyphen-Bonds was to have upon my destiny.

Bismillah! (Whatever that means!)

II

After half an hour's wandering about I stumbled across a curio-shop, a weird, dim and dusty, musty old curio-shop, with stuffed peacocks hanging from the ceiling, and skulls, and bronzes and marbles, paintings, tarnished jewelry and ancient armor, rare books in vellum, small arms, tapestry, pastimes, plaster masks, and musical instruments. I recalled to mind the shop of the dealer in antiquities in Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*, and glanced about (not without a shiver) for the fatal ass's skin. (I forgot that I was wearing it myself that night!) I was something of a collector of antiquities, of the inanimate kind, and for a time I became lost in speculation, — speculation rather agreeable of its kind. I liked to conjure up in fancy the various scenes through which these curiosities had drifted in their descent to this demi-pawnshop; the brave men and beautiful women, the clangor of tocsins, the haze of battles, the glitter of ball-rooms, epochs and ages. What romance lay behind yon satin

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slipper? What *grande dame* had smiled behind that ivory fan? What meant that tarnished silver mask?

The old French proprietor was evidently all things from a pawnbroker to an art collector; for most of the jewelry was in excellent order and the pictures possessed value far beyond the intrinsic. He was waiting upon a customer, and the dingy light that shone down on his bald bumpy head made it look for all the world like an ill-used billiard-ball. He was exhibiting revolvers.

From the shining metal of the small arms, my glance traveled to the face of the prospective buyer. It was an interesting face, clean-cut, beardless, energetic, but the mouth impressed me as being rather hard. Doubtless he felt the magnetism of my scrutiny, for he suddenly looked around. The expression on his face was not one to induce me to throw my arms around his neck and declare I should be glad to make his acquaintance. It was a scowl. He was in evening dress, and I could see that he knew very well how to wear it. All this was but momentary. He took up a revolver and balanced it on his palm.

By and by the proprietor came sidling along be-

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hind the cases, the slip-slip fashion of his approach informing me that he wore slippers.

"Do you keep costumes?" I asked.

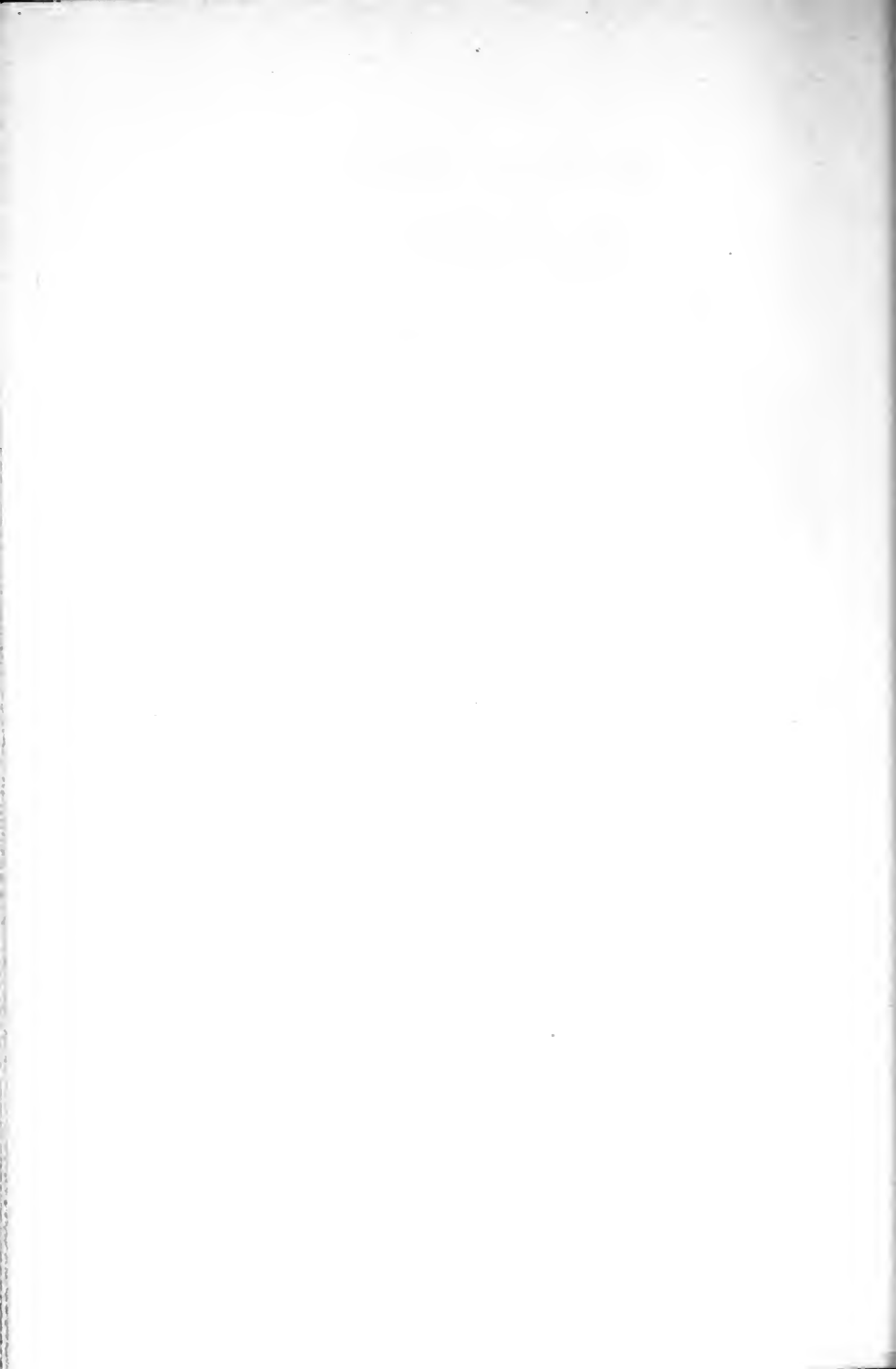
"Anything you like, sir, from a crusader to a modern gentleman,"—with grim and appropriate irony. "What is it you are in search of—a masquerade costume?"

"Only a grey mask," I answered. "I am going to a masked ball to-night as a Grey Capuchin, and I want a mask that will match my robe."

"Your wants are simple."

From a shelf he brought down a box, took off the cover, and left me to make my selection. Soon I found what I desired and laid it aside, waiting for Monsieur Friard to return. Again I observed the other customer. There is always a mystery to be solved and a story to be told, when a man makes the purchase of a pistol in a pawnshop. A man who buys a pistol for the sake of protection does so in the light of day, and in the proper place, a gun-shop. He does not haunt the pawnbroker in the dusk of evening. Well, it was none of my business; doubtless he knew what he was doing. I coughed suggestively, and Friard came slipping in my direction again.





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"This is what I want. How much?" I inquired.

"Fifty cents; it has never been worn."

I drew out my wallet. I had arrived in town too late to go to the bank, and I was carrying an uncomfortably large sum in gold-bills. As I opened the wallet to extract a small bill, I saw the stranger eying me quietly. Well, well, the dullest being brightens at the sight of money and its representatives. I drew out a small bill and handed it to the proprietor. He took it, together with the mask, and sidled over to the cash-register. The bell gave forth a muffled sound, not unlike that of a fire-bell in a snow-storm. As he was in the act of wrapping up my purchase, I observed the silent customer's approach. When he reached my side he stooped and picked up something from the floor. With a bow he presented it to me.

"I saw it drop from your pocket," he said; and then when he saw what it was, his jaw fell, and he sent me a hot, penetrating glance.

"The ten of hearts!" he exclaimed in amazement.

I laughed easily.

"The ten of hearts!" he repeated.

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"Yes; four hearts on one side and four on the other, and two in the middle, which make ten in all,"—raillery in my tones. What the deuce *was* the matter with everybody to-night? "Marvelous card, isn't it?"

"Very strange!" he murmured, pulling at his lips.

"And in what way is it strange?" I asked, rather curious to learn the cause of his agitation.

"There are several reasons,"—briefly.

"Ah!"

"I have seen a man's hand pinned to that card; therefore it is gruesome."

"Some card-sharper?"

He nodded. "Then again, I lost a small fortune because of that card,"—diffidently.

"Poker?"

"Yes. Why will a man try to fill a royal flush? The man next to me drew the ten of hearts, the very card I needed. The sight of it always unnerves me. I beg your pardon."

"Oh, that's all right," said I, wondering how many more lies he had up his sleeve.

"And there's still another reason. I saw a

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man put six bullets into the two central spots, and an hour later the seventh bullet snuffed the candle of a friend of mine. I am from the West."

"I can sympathize with you," I returned. "After all that trouble, the sight of the card must have given you a shock."

Then I stowed away the fatal card and took up my bundle and change. I have in my own time tried to fill royal flushes, and the disappointment still lingers with a bitter taste.

"The element of chance is the most fascinating thing there is," the stranger from the West volunteered.

"So it is," I replied, suddenly recalling that I was soon to put my trust in the hands of that very fickle goddess.

He nodded and returned to his revolvers, while I went out of the shop, hailed a cab, and drove up-town to my apartments in Riverside. It was eight o'clock by my watch. I leaned back against the cushions, ruminating. There seemed to be something going on that night; the ten of hearts was acquiring a mystifying, not to say sinister, aspect. First it had alarmed the girl in Mou-

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quin's, and now this stranger in the curio-shop. I was confident that the latter had lied in regard to his explanations. The card *had* startled him, but his reasons were altogether of transparent thinness. A man never likes to confess that he is unlucky at cards; there is a certain pride in lying about the enormous stakes you have won and the wonderful draws you have made. I frowned. It was not possible for me to figure out what his interest in the card was. If he was a Westerner, his buying a pistol in a pawnshop was at once disrobed of its mystery; but the inconsistent elegance of his evening clothes doubled my suspicions. Bah! What was the use of troubling myself with this stranger's affairs? He would never cross my path again.

In reasonable time the cab drew up in front of my apartments. I dressed, donned my Capuchin's robe and took a look at myself in the pier-glass. Then I unwrapped the package and put on the mask. The whole made a capital outfit, and I was vastly pleased with myself. This was going to be such an adventure as one reads about in the ancient numbers of *Blackwood's*. I slipped the

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robe and mask into my suit-case and lighted my pipe. During great moments like this, a man gathers courage and confidence from a pipeful of tobacco. I dropped into a comfortable Morris, touched the gas-logs, and fell into a pleasant dream. It was not necessary for me to start for the Twenty-third Street ferry till nine; so I had something like three-quarters of an hour to idle away. . . . What beautiful hair that girl had! It was like sunshine, the silk of corn, the yield of the harvest. And the marvelous abundance of it! It was true that she was an artist's model; it was equally true that she had committed a mild impropriety in addressing me as she had; but, for all I could see, she was a girl of delicate breeding, doubtless one of the many whose family fortunes, or misfortunes, force them to earn a living. And it is no disgrace these days to pose as an artist's model. The classic oils, nowadays, call only for exquisite creations in gowns and hats; mythology was exhausted by the old masters. Rome, Paris, London; possibly a bohemian existence in these cities accounted for her ease in striking up a conversation, harmless enough, with a

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total stranger. In Paris and Rome it was all very well; but it is a risky thing to do in unromantic New York and London. However, her uncle had been with her; a veritable fortress, had I overstepped the bounds of politeness.

The smoke wavered and rolled about me. I took out the ten of hearts and studied it musingly. After all, should I go? Would it be wise? I confess I saw goblins' heads peering from the spots, and old Poe stories returned to me! Pshaw! It was only a frolic, no serious harm could possibly come of it. I would certainly go, now I had gone thus far. What fool idea the girl was bent on I hadn't the least idea; but I easily recognized the folly upon which I was about to set sail. Heigh-ho! What was a lonely young bachelor to do? At the most, they could only ask me to vacate the premises, should I be so unfortunate as to be discovered. In that event, Teddy Hamilton would come to my assistance. . . . She was really beautiful! And then I awoke to the alarming fact that the girl in Mouquin's was interesting me more than I liked to confess.

Presently, through the haze of smoke, I saw

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a patch of white paper on the rug in front of the pier-glass. I rose and picked it up.

NAME Hawthorne

COSTUME Blue Domino

TIME 5:30 P. M.

RETURNED _____

ADDRESS West 87th Street

FRIARD'S

I stared at the bit of pasteboard, fascinated. How the deuce had this got into my apartments? A Blue Domino? Ha! I had it! Old Friard had accidentally done up the ticket with my mask. A Blue Domino; evidently I wasn't the only person who was going to a masquerade. Without doubt this fair demoiselle was about to join the festivities of some shop-girls' masquerade, where money and pedigree are inconsequent things, and where everybody is either a "loidy" or a "gent." Persons who went to *my* kind of masquerade did

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not rent their costumes; they laid out extravagant sums to the fashionable modiste and tailor, and had them made to order. A Blue Domino: humph!

It was too late to take the ticket back to Friard's; so I determined to mail it to him in the morning.

It was now high time for me to be off. I got into my coat and took down my opera hat. Outside the storm was still active; but the snow had a promising softness, and there were patches of stars to be seen here and there in the sky. By midnight there would be a full moon. I got to Jersey City without mishap; and when I took my seat in the smoker, I found I had ten minutes to spare. I bought a newspaper and settled down to read the day's news. It was fully half an hour between Jersey City and Blankshire; in that time I could begin and finish the paper.

There never was a newspaper those days that hadn't a war-map in some one of its columns; and when I had digested the latest phases of the war in the far East, I quite naturally turned to the sporting-page to learn what was going on among the other professional fighters. (Have I mentioned to you the fact that I was all through the Spanish War, the mix-up in China, and that I had resigned

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my commission to accept the post of traveling salesman for a famous motor-car company? If I have not, pardon me. You will now readily accept my recklessness of spirit as a matter of course.) I turned over another page; from this I learned that the fair sex was going back to puff-sleeves again. Many an old sleeve was going to be turned upside down.

Fudge! The train was rattling through the yards. Another page crackled. Ha! Here was that unknown gentleman-thief again, up to his old tricks. It is remarkable how difficult it is to catch a thief who has good looks and shrewd brains. I had already written him down as a quasi-swell. For months the police had been finding clues, but they had never laid eyes on the rascal. The famous Haggerty of the New York detective force,—a man whom not a dozen New York policemen knew by sight and no criminals save those behind bars, earthly and eternal,—was now giving his whole attention to the affair. Some gaily-dressed lady at a ball would suddenly find she had lost some valuable gems; and that would be the end of the affair, for none ever recovered her gems.

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The gentleman-thief was still at large, and had gathered to his account a comfortable fortune; that is, if he were not already rich and simply a kleptomaniac. No doubt he owned one of my racing-cars, and was clear of the delinquent lists at his clubs. I dismissed all thought of him, threw aside the paper, and mentally figured out my commissions on sales during the past month. It was a handsome figure, large enough for two. This pastime, too, soon failed to interest me. I gazed out of the window and watched the dark shapes as they sped past.

I saw the girl's face from time to time. What a fool I had been not to ask her name! She could easily have refused, and yet as easily have granted the request. At any rate, I had permitted the chance to slip out of my reach, which was exceedingly careless on my part. Perhaps they — she and her uncle — frequently dined at Mouquin's; I determined to haunt the place and learn. It would be easy enough to address her the next time we met. Besides, she would be curious to know all about the ten of hearts and the desperate adventure upon which I told her I was about to embark. Many a fine friendship has grown out of smaller things.

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Next, turning from the window, I fell to examining my fellow passengers, in the hope of seeing some one I knew. Conversation on trains makes short journeys. . . . I sat up stiffly in my seat. Diagonally across the aisle sat the very chap I had met in the curio-shop! He was quietly reading a popular magazine, and occasionally a smile lightened his sardonic mouth. Funny that I should run across him twice in the same evening! Men who are contemplating suicide never smile in that fashion. He was smoking a small, well-colored meerschaum pipe with evident relish. Somehow, when a man clenches his teeth upon the mouth-piece of a respectable pipe, it seems impossible to associate that man with crime. But the fact that I had seen him selecting a pistol in a pawnshop rather neutralized the good opinion I was willing to form. I have already expressed my views upon the subject. The sight of him rather worried me, though I could not reason why. Whither was he bound? Had he finally taken one of Friard's pistols? For a moment I was on the point of speaking to him, if only to hear him tell more lies about the ten of hearts, but I wisely put aside the temptation. Besides, it might be possible that he would not be glad to see me. I always avoid the chance

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acquaintance, unless, of course, the said chance acquaintance is met under favorable circumstances — like the girl in Mouquin's, for instance! After all, it was only an incident; and, but for his picking up that card, I never should have remembered him.

Behind him sat a fellow with a countenance as red and round and complacent as an English butler's, — red hair and small twinkling eyes. Once he leaned over and spoke to my chance acquaintance, who, without turning his head, thrust a match over his shoulder. The man with the face of a butler lighted the most villainous pipe I ever beheld. I wondered if they knew each other. But, closely as I watched, I saw no sign from either. I turned my collar up and snuggled down. There was no need of his seeing *me*.

Then my thoughts reverted to the ten of hearts again. My ten of hearts! The wrinkle of a chill ran up and down my spine! My ten of hearts!

Hastily I took out the card and examined the *back* of it. It was an uncommonly handsome back, representing Diana, the moon, and the midnight sky. A horrible supposition came to me: supposing they looked at the back as well as at the face of the card? And again, supposing I was

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miles away from the requisite color and design? I was staggered. Here was a pretty fix! I had never even dreamed of such a contingency. Hang it! I now wished I had stuck to my original plan, and gone to the theater. Decidedly I was in for it; there was no backing down at this late hour, unless I took the return train for Jersey City; and I possessed too much stubbornness to surrender to any such weakness. Either I should pass the door-committee, or I shouldn't; of one thing I was certain —

“Blankshire!” bawled the trainman; then the train slowed down and finally came to a stop.

No turning back for me now. I picked up my suit-case and got out. On the platform I saw the curio-shop fellow again. Tramping on ahead, the smell from his villainous pipe assailing my nostrils, was the man who had asked for a match. The former stood undecided for a moment, and during this space of time he caught sight of me. He became erect, gave me a sudden sardonic laugh, and swiftly disappeared into the dark. All this was uncommonly disquieting; in vain I stared into the blackness that had swallowed him. What could he be doing here at Blankshire? I didn't like his

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laugh at all; there was at once a menace and a challenge in it.

"Any baggage, sir?" asked one of the station hands.

"No." But I asked him to direct me to a hotel. He did so.

I made my way down the street. The wind had veered around and was coming in from the sea, pure and cold. The storm-clouds were broken and scudding like dark ships, and at times there were flashes of radiant moonshine.

The fashionable hotel was full. So I plodded through the drifts to the unfashionable hotel. Here I found accommodation. I dressed, sometimes laughing, sometimes whistling, sometimes standing motionless in doubt. Bah! It was only a lark. . . . I thought of the girl in Mouquin's; how much better it would have been to spend the evening with her, exchanging badinage, and looking into each other's eyes! Pshaw! I covered my face with the grey mask and descended to the street.

The trolley ran within two miles of the Hunt Club. The car was crowded with masqueraders, and for the first time since I started out I felt

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comfortable. Everybody laughed and talked, though nobody knew who his neighbor was. I sat in a corner, silent and motionless as a sphinx. Once a pair of blue slippers attracted my eye, and again the flash of a lovely arm. At the end of the trolley line was a carryall which was to convey us to the club. We got into the conveyance, noisily and good-humoredly. The exclamations of the women were amusing.

“Good gracious!”

“Isn’t it fun!”

“Lovely!” And all that. It must have been a novelty for some of these to act naturally for once. Nothing lasts so long as the natural instinct for play; and we always find ourselves coming back to it.

Standing some hundred yards back from the road was the famous Hollywood Inn, run by the genial Moriarty. Sometimes the members of the Hunt Club put up there for the night when there was to be a run the following morning. It was open all the year round.

We made the club at exactly ten-thirty. Fortune went with me; doubtless it was the crowd going in that saved me from close scrutiny. My

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spirits rose as I espied Teddy Hamilton at the door. He was on the committee, and was in plain evening clothes. It was good to see a familiar face. I shouldered toward him and passed out my ten dollars.

"Hello, Teddy, my son!" I cried out jovially.

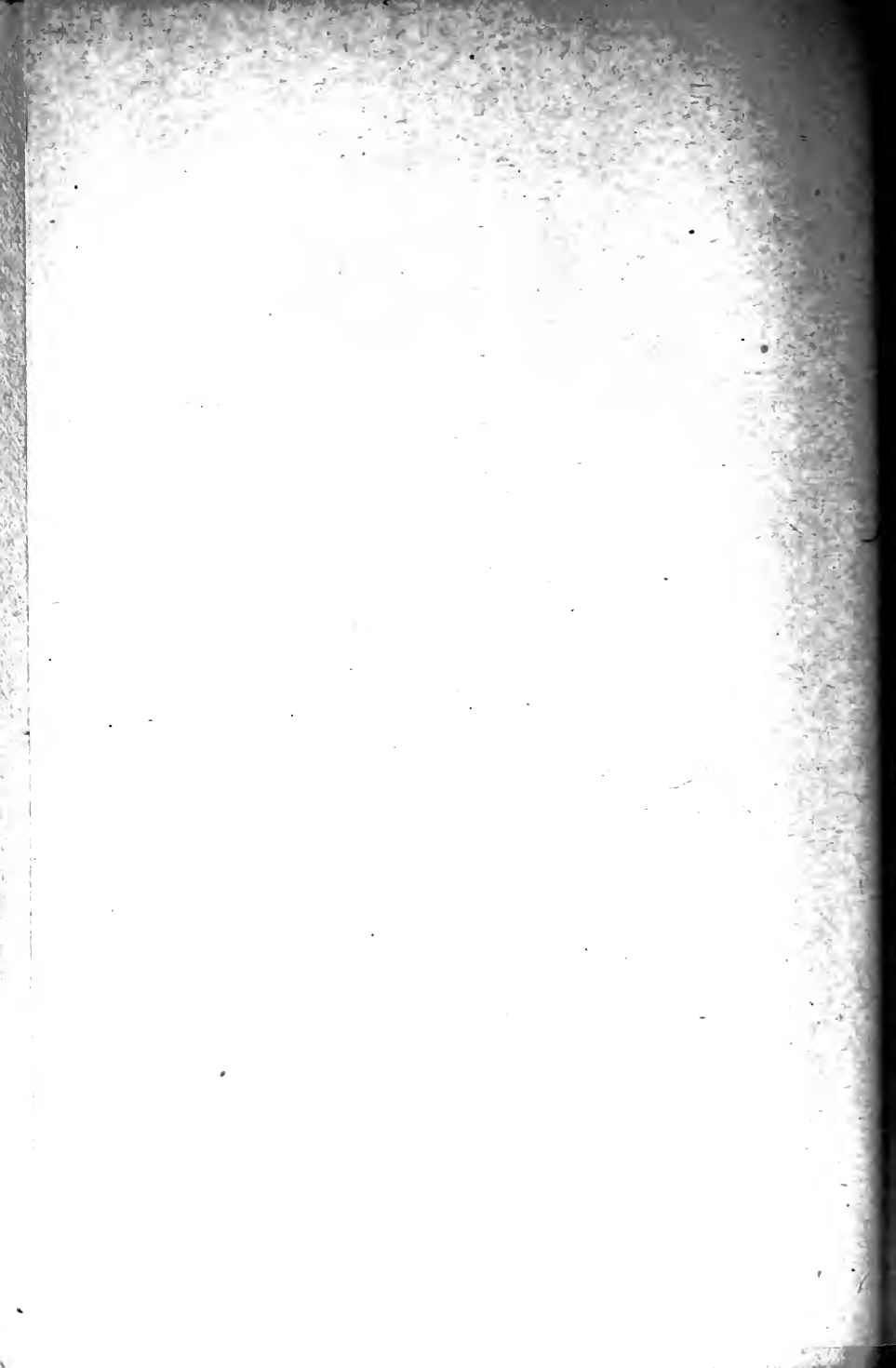
"Hello!"—grinning. Teddy thought it was some one he knew; well, so it was. "What's your card?" he cried, as I pressed by him.

"The ten of hearts."

"The ten of hearts," repeated Teddy to a man who was keeping tally on a big cardboard.

This sight did not reassure me. If they were keeping tally of all the cards presented at the door, they would soon find out that there were too many tens of hearts, too many by one! Well, at any rate, I had for the time being escaped detection; now for the fun. It would be sport-royal while it lasted. What a tale to give out at the club of a Sunday night! I chuckled on the way to the ball-room: I had dispensed with going up to the dressing-room. My robe was a genuine one, heavy and warm; so I had no overcoat to check.





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"Grave monk, your blessing!"

Turning, I beheld an exquisite Columbine.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" I replied solemnly.

"*Pax* . . . What does that mean?"

"It means, do not believe all you see in the newspapers."

Columbine laughed gaily. "I did not know that you were a Latin scholar; and besides, you gave me to understand you were coming as a Jesuit, Billy."

Billy? Here was one who thought she knew me. I hastened to disillusion her.

"My dear Columbine, you do not know me, not the least bit. My name is not Billy, it is Dicky."

"Oh, you can not fool me," she returned. "I heard you call out to Teddy Hamilton that your card was the ten of hearts; and you wrote me, saying that would be your card."

Complications already, and I hadn't yet put a foot inside the ball-room!

"I am sorry," I said, "but you have made a mistake. Your Jesuit probably told you his card would be the nine, not the ten."

"I will wager —"

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“Hush! This is a charity dance; no one makes wagers at such affairs.”

“But — Why, my goodness! there’s my Jesuit now!” And to my intense relief she dashed away.

I carefully observed the Jesuit, and made up my mind to keep an eye upon him. If he really possessed the ten of hearts, the man who kept tally on the cardboard was doing some tall thinking about this time. I glided away, into the gorgeous ball-room.

What a vision greeted my eye! The decorations were in red and yellow, and it seemed as though perpetual autumnal sunset lay over everything. At the far end of the room was a small stage hidden behind palms and giant ferns. The band was just striking up *A Summer Night in Munich*, and a wonderful kaleidoscope revolved around me. I saw Cavaliers and Roundheads, Puritans and Beelzebubs, Musketeers, fools, cowboys, Indians, kings and princes; queens and empresses, fairies and Quaker maids, white and black and red and green dominoes. Tom Fool’s night, indeed!

Presently I saw the noble Doge of Venice coming my way. From his portly carriage I reasoned that if he wasn’t in the gold-book of Venice he

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stood very well up in the gold-book of New York. He stopped at my side and struck an attitude.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" said I, bowing.

"Be at the Inquisition Chamber, directly the clock strikes the midnight hour," he said mysteriously.

"I shall be there to deliver the supreme interrogation," I replied.

"It is well." He drifted away like a stately ship.

Delightful foolery! I saw the Jesuit, and moved toward him.

"Disciple of Loyola, hast thou the ten of hearts?"

"My hearts number nine, for I have lost one to the gay Columbine."

"I breathe! 'Thou art not he whom I seek." We separated. I was mortally glad that Columbine had made a mistake.

The women always seek the monk at a masquerade; they want absolution for the follies they are about to commit. A demure Quakeress touched my sleeve in passing.

"Tell me, grave monk, why did you seek the monastery?"

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"My wife fell in love with me,"—gloomily.

"Then you have a skeleton in the clothes-press?"

"Do I look like a man who owned such a thing as a clothes-press, much less so fashionable a thing as a family skeleton?"

"Then what do you here?"

"I am mingling with fools as a penance."

A fool caught me by the sleeve and batted me gaily over the head with a bladder.

"Merry come up, why am I a fool?"

"It is the fashion," was my answer. This was like to gain me the reputation of being a wit. I must walk carefully, or these thoughtless ones would begin to suspect there was an impostor among them.

"Aha!" There was mine ancient friend Julius.
"Hail Cæsar!"

He stopped.

"Shall I beware the Ides of March?" I asked jovially.

"Nay, my good Cassius; rather beware of the ten of hearts," said Cæsar in hollow tones, and he was gone.

The ten of hearts again! Hang the card!

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And then with a sigh of relief I recollected that in all probability he, like Columbine, had heard me call out the card to Hamilton. Still, the popularity of the card was very disquieting. I wished it had been seven or five; there's luck in odd numbers. . . . A Blue Domino! My heart leaped, and I thought of the little ticket in my waistcoat pocket. A Blue Domino! If, by chance, there should be a connection between her and the ticket!

She was sitting all alone in a corner near-by, partly screened by a pot of orange-trees. I crossed over and sat down by her side. This might prove an adventure worth while.

"What a beautiful night it is!" I said.

She turned, and I caught sight of a wisp of golden hair.

"That is very original," said she. "Who in the world would have thought of passing comments on the weather at a masque! Prior to this moment the men have been calling me all sorts of sentimental names."

"Oh, I am coming to that. I am even going to make love to you."

She folded her hands, — rather resignedly, I thought, — and the rollicking comedy began.

III

When they give you a mask at a ball they also give you the key to all manner of folly and impudence. Even stupid persons become witty, and the witty become correspondingly daring. For all I knew, the Blue Domino at my side might be Jones' wife, or Brown's, or Smith's, or even Green's; but so long as I was not certain, it mattered not in what direction my whimsical fancy took me. (It is true that ordinarily Jones and Brown and Smith and Green do not receive invitations to attend masquerades at fashionable hunt clubs; but somehow they seem to worry along without these equivocal honors, and prosper. Still, there are persons in the swim named Johnes and Smythe and Browne and Greene. Pardon this parenthesis!)

As I recollected the manner in which I had self-invited the pleasure of my company to this carnival at the Blankshire Hunt Club, I smiled behind my mask. Nerves! I ought to have been a pro-

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fessor of clinics instead of an automobile agent. But the whole affair appealed to me so strongly I could not resist it. I was drawn into the tangle by the very fascination of the scheme. I was an interloper, but nobody knew it. The ten of hearts in my pocket did not match the backs of those cards regularly issued. But what of that? Every one was ignorant of the fact. I was safe inside; and all that was romantic in my system was aroused. There are always some guests who can not avail themselves of their invitations; and upon this vague chance I had staked my play. Besides, I was determined to disappear before the hour of unmasking. I wasn't going to take any unnecessary risks. I was, then, fairly secure under my Capuchin's robe.

Out of my mind slipped the previous adventures of the evening. I forgot, temporarily, the beautiful unknown at Mouquin's. I forgot the sardonic-lipped stranger I had met in Friard's. I forgot everything save the little ticket that had accidentally slipped into my package, and which announced that some one had rented a blue domino.

And here was a Blue Domino at my side, just simply dying to have me talk to her!

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"I am madly in love with you," I began. "I have followed you often; I have seen you in your box at the opera; I have seen you whirl up Fifth Avenue in your fine barouche; and here at last I meet you!" I clasped my hands passionately.

"My beautiful barouche! My box at the opera!" the girl mimicked. "What a cheerful Ananias you are!"

"Thou art the most enchanting creature in all the universe. Thou art even as a turquoise, a patch of radiant summer sky, eyes of sapphire, lips —"

"Archaic, very archaic," she interrupted.

"Disillusioned in ten seconds!" I cried dismally. "How could you?"

She laughed.

"Have you no romance? Can you not see the fitness of things? If you have not a box at the opera, you ought at least to make believe you have. History walks about us, and you call the old style archaic! That hurts!"

"Methinks, Sir Monk —"

"There! That's more like it. By my halidom, that's the style!"

"Odds bodkins, you don't tell me!" There

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was a second ripple of laughter from behind the mask. It was rare music.

"I *could* fall in love with you!"

"There once was a Frenchman who said that as nothing is impossible, let us believe in the absurd. I might be old enough to be your grandmother,"—lightly.

"Perish the thought!"

"Perish it, indeed!"

"The mask is the thing!" I cried enthusiastically. "You can make love to another man's wife —"

"Or to your own, and nobody is the wiser,"—cynically.

"We are getting on."

"Yes, we are getting on, both in years and in folly. What are you doing in a monk's robe? Where is your motley, gay fool?"

"I have laid it aside for the night. On such occasions as this, fools dress as wise men, and wise men as fools; everybody goes about in disguise."

"How would you go about to pick out the fools?"—curiously.

"Beginning with myself —"

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"Thy name is also Candor!"

"Look at yonder Cavalier. He wabbles like a ship in distress, in the wild effort to keep his feet untangled from his rapier. I'll wager he's a wealthy plumber on week-days. Observe Anne of Austria! What arms! I'll lay odds that her great-grandmother took in washing. There's Romeo, now, with a pair of legs like an old apple tree. The freedom of criticism is mine to-night! Did you ever see such ridiculous ideas of costume? For my part, the robe and the domino for me. All lines are destroyed; nothing is recognizable. My, my! There's Harlequin, too, walking on parentheses."

The Blue Domino laughed again.

"You talk as if you had no friends here,"—shrewdly.

"But which is my friend and which is the man to whom I owe money?"

"What! Is your tailor here then?"

"Heaven forbid! Strange, isn't it, when a fellow starts in to pay up his bills, that the tailor and the undertaker have to wait till the last."

"The subject is outside my understanding."

"But you have dressmakers."

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"I seldom pay dressmakers."

"Ah! Then you belong to the most exclusive set!"

"Or perhaps I make my own dresses —"

"Sh! Not so loud. Supposing some one should overhear you?"

"It was a slip of the tongue. And yet, you should be lenient to all."

"Kind heart! Ah, I wonder what all those interrogation points mean — the black domino there?"

"Possibly she represents Scandal."

"Scandal, then, is symbolized by the interrogation point?"

"Yes. Whoever heard of scandal coming to a full stop, that is to say, a period."

"I learn something every minute. A hundred years ago you would have been a cousin to Made-moiselle de Necker."

"Or Madame de Staël."

"Oh, if you are married —"

"I shall have ceased to interest you?"

"On the contrary. Only, marriage would account for the bitterness of your tone. What does the Blue Domino represent?"

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"The needle of the compass." She stretched a sleeve out toward me and I observed for the first time the miniature compasses woven in the cloth. Surely, one does not rent a costume like this.

"I understand now why you attracted me. Whither will you guide me?"—sentimentally.

"Through dark channels and stormy seas, over tropic waters, 'into the haven under the hill.'"

"Oh, if you go to quoting Tennyson, it's all up with me. *Are* you married?"

"One can easily see that at any rate *you* are not."

"Explain."

"Your voice lacks the proper and requisite anxiety. It is always the married woman who enjoys the mask with thoroughness. She knows her husband will be watching her; and jealousy is a good sign."

"You are a philosopher. Certainly you must be married."

"Well, one does become philosophical — after marriage."

"But are you married?"

"I do not say so."

"Would you like to be?"

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“I have my share of feminine curiosity. But I wonder,”—ruminating, “why they do not give masquerades oftener.”

“That is easily explained. Most of us live masquerades day by day, and there might be too much of a good thing.”

“That is a bit of philosophy that goes well with your robe. Indeed, what better mask is there than the human countenance?”

“If we become serious, we shall put folly out of joint,” said I, rising. “And besides, we shall miss the best part of this dance.”

She did not hesitate an instant. I led her to the floor, and we joined the dancers. She was as light as a feather, a leaf, the down of the thistle; mysterious as the Cumæan Sibyl; and I wondered who she might be. The hand that lay on my sleeve was as white as milk, and the filbert-shaped horn of the finger-tips was the tint of rose leaves. *Was* she connected with the ticket in my pocket? I tried to look into her eyes, but in vain; nothing could I see but that wisp of golden hair which occasionally brushed my chin as with a surreptitious caress. If only I dared remain till the unmasking! I pressed her hand. There was an answering pressure, but

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its tenderness was destroyed by the low laughter that accompanied it.

"Don't be silly!" she whispered.

"How can I help it?"

"True; I forgot you were a fool in disguise."

"What has Romance done to you that you should turn on her with the stuffed-club, Practicality?"

"She has never paid any particular attention to me; perhaps that is the reason."

As we neared a corner I saw the Honorable Julius again. He stretched forth his death's-head mask.

"Beware the ten of hearts!" he croaked.

Hang his impudence! . . . The Blue Domino turned her head with a jerk; and instantly I felt a shiver run through her body. For a moment she lost step. I was filled with wonder. In what manner could the ten of hearts disturb *her*? I made up my mind to seek out the noble Roman and learn just how much he knew about that disquieting card.

The music ceased.

"Now, run away with your benedictions," said the Blue Domino breathlessly.

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"Shall I see you again?"—eagerly.

"If you seek diligently." She paused for a moment, like a bird about to take flight. "Positive, fool; comparative, fooler; superlative, fool-est!"

And I was left standing alone: What the deuce did she mean by that?

After all, there might be any number of blue dominoes in the land; and it seemed scarcely credible that a guest at the Hunt Club would go to a costumer's for an outfit. (I had gone to a costumer's, but my case was altogether different. I was an impostor.) I hunted up *Imperator Rex*. It was not long ere we came face to face, or, to speak correctly, mask to mask.

"What do you know about the ten of hearts?" I began with directness.

"I am a shade; all things are known to me."

"You may be a lamp-shade, for all I care. What do you know about the ten of hearts?"

"Beware of it,"—hollowly. From under his toga he produced a ten of hearts!

My knees wobbled, and there was a sense of looseness about my collar. The fellow *knew* I was an impostor. Why didn't he denounce me?

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"Is the back of your card anything like this one?"—ironically. "I dare say it isn't. But have your good time, grave monk; doubtless you are willing that the fiddlers shall be paid." And wrapping his toga about him majestically, he stalked away, leaving me staring dumfoundedly after his receding form.

Discovered!

The deuce! Had I been attired like yon Romeo, I certainly should have taken to my heels; but a fellow can not run in a Capuchin's gown, and retain any dignity. I would much rather be arrested than laughed at. I stood irresolute. What was to be done? How much did he know? Did he know who I was? And what was his object in letting me run my course? I was all at sea. . . . Hang the grisly old Roman! I shut my teeth; I would see the comedy to its end, no matter what befell. If worst came to worst, there was always Teddy Hamilton to fall back on.

I made off toward the smoking-room, rumbling imprecations against the gods for having given me the idea of attending this masquerade, when it would have been cheaper and far more comfortable to go to the theater.

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But as soon as I entered the smoking-room, I laughed. It was a droll scene. Here we were, all of us, trying savagely to smoke a cigar or cigarette through the flabby aperture designated in a mask as the mouth. It was a hopeless job; for myself, I gave it up in disgust.

Nobody dared talk naturally for fear of being identified. When a man did open his mouth it was only to commit some banal idiocy, for which, during office hours, he would have been haled to the nearest insane asylum and labeled incurable. Added to this was a heat matching Sahara's and the oppressive odor of weltering paint.

By Jove! Only one man knew that the back of my card was unlike the others: the man who had picked it up in old Friard's curio-shop, the man who had come to Blankshire with me! I knew now. He had been there buying a costume like myself. He had seen me on the train, and had guessed the secret. I elbowed my way out of the smoking-room. It wouldn't do me a bit of harm to ask a few polite questions of Mr. Cæsar of the sardonic laugh.

But I had lost the golden opportunity. Cæsar had gone to join the shades of other noble Ro-

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mans; in vain I searched high and low for him. Once I ran into Hamilton. His face was pale and disturbed and anxious.

"What's the trouble, Hamilton?" I asked, with forced gaiety.

He favored me with a penetrating glance.

"The very devil is the trouble," he growled. "Several of the ladies have begun to miss valuable jewels. Anne of Austria has lost her necklace and Queen Elizabeth is without a priceless comb; altogether, about ten thousand dollars."

"Robbery?" I looked at him aghast.

"That's the word. Curse the luck! There is always something of this sort happening to spoil the fun. But whoever has the jewels will not get away with them."

"What are you going to do?"

"I have already sent for the village police. Now I shall lock all the doors and make every man and woman produce cards for identification,"—abruptly leaving me.

Thunderbolts out of heaven! My knees and collar bothered me again; the first attack was trifling compared to this second seizure. How the devil was I to get out?

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"Are you searching for me?" inquired a soft voice at my elbow.

I turned instantly. The Blue Domino had come back to me.

"I have been searching for you everywhere," I said gallantly.

"Oh! but that is a black one. Never mind; the fib was well meant."

I led her over to a secluded nook, within a few feet of the door which gave entrance to the club cellars. This door I had been bearing in mind for some time. It is well to know your topography. The door was at the left of the band platform. There was a twin-door on the other side. We sat down.

"Have you heard the news?" I asked.

"No. Has some one been discovered making love to his own wife by mistake?"

"It's serious. Anne of Austria and Queen Elizabeth have been robbed of some jewels."

"A thief among us?"

"A regular Galloping Dick. I'm a thief myself, for that matter."

"You?" she drew away from me a bit.

"Yes. My name is Procrastination."

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"Ah, my grave Capuchin, we do not steal time; we merely waste it. But is what you tell me true?"

"I am very sorry to say it is. The jewels were worth something like ten thousand dollars."

"Merciful heavens!"

"It is true, infernally true,"—looking around to see if by chance Cæsar had reappeared on the scene. (How was I to manage my escape? It is true I might hie me to the cellars; but how to get out of the cellars!) "Have you seen Julius Cæsar?" I asked.

"Cæsar?"

"Yes, Miss Hawthorne —"

The Blue Domino swung about and leaned toward me, her hands tense upon the sides of her chair.

"What name did you say?"—a strained note in her voice.

"Hawthorne," I answered, taking out the slip of pasteboard. "See! it says that one blue domino was rented of Monsieur Friard at five-thirty this afternoon."

"How did you come by that ticket?" she demanded.

"It was a miracle. I purchased a mask there,



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and this ticket was wrapped up in my bundle by mistake."

"It is a curious coincidence,"—her voice normal and unagitated.

I was confused. "Then I am mistaken?"—my chagrin evident. (All this while, mind you, I was wondering if that cellar-door was unlocked, and how long it would take me to reach it before the dénouement!)

"One way or the other, it does not matter," said she.

"Yet, if I could reach the cellars,"—absently. Then I bit my tongue.

"Cellars? Who said anything about cellars? I meant that this is not the hour for unmasking or disclosing one's identity,"—coldly.

"And yet, when Cæsar whispered 'Beware the ten of hearts,' you turned and shuddered. What have you to offer in defense?"

"It was the horrid mask he wore."

"Well, it wasn't handsome of him."

"What did you mean by cellars?"—suddenly becoming the inquisitor in her turn.

"I? Oh, I was thinking what I should do in case of fire,"—nimblely.

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"That is not the truth."

"Well, no, it isn't. Can you keep a secret?" I whispered.

"If it isn't a terrible one."

"Well, I have no earthly business here. I am an impostor."

"An impostor!"

"Yes. And for the past few minutes, since I heard of the robbery, I've been thinking how I could get out of here upon the slightest notice." While the reckless spirit was upon me, I produced the fatal card and showed the back to her. "You will find that yours is of a different color. But I am not the Galloping Dick; it was only a hare-brained lark on my part, and I had no idea it would turn out serious like this. I was going to disappear before they unmasked. What would you advise me to do?"

She took the card, studied it, and finally returned it. There followed an interval of silence.

"I have known the imposition from the first," she said.

"What!"

She touched the signet-ring on my little finger. "I have seen that once before to-night. No," she

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mused, "you will not blow up the post-office to-night, nor the police-station."

She lifted the corner of her mask, and I beheld the girl I had met in Mouquin's!

"You?"

"Silence! So this is the meaning of your shuffling those cards? Oh, it is certainly droll!" She laughed.

"And are you Miss Hawthorne?"

"I am still in the mask, sir; I shall answer none of your questions."

"This is the finest romance in the world!" I cried.

"You were talking about getting out," she said.

"Shall I lend you my domino? But that would be useless. Such a prestidigitator as Signor Fantoccini has only to say—Presto! and disappear at once."

"I assure you, it is no laughing matter."

"I see it from a different angle."

An artist's model, and yet a guest at this exclusive function?

A commotion around the stage distracted us. Presently we saw Teddy Hamilton mount the stage and hold up his hands.

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"Attention, ladies and gentlemen!" he called.

Silence gradually fell upon the motley groups of masqueraders.

"A thief is among us. I have had all the exits closed. Everybody will be so kind as to present cards at the main entrance. Three ten-spots of hearts have been tallied on the comparing lists. We have been imposed upon. The police are on the way. Very sorry to cause you this annoyance. The identity of the holders of the cards will be known only to those of us on the committee."

Silence and then a murmur which soon became a buzzing like that of many bees.

The Blue Domino suddenly clutched my arm.

"Please take me away, take me away at once! I'm an impostor, too!"

Two of us!

This was disaster. I give you my solemn word, there was nothing I regretted so much as the fact that I hadn't gone to the theater.

But I am a man of quick thought and resource. In the inelegant phrasing of the day, me for the cellars!

"Come," said I to the girl; "There's only one chance in a hundred, but we'll take it together."

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"Together? Where?"

"Why, to the cellars. I've a pocketful of matches. We can make a try. For, if there's a thief around, and we are caught and proved impostors—Well, I leave you to imagine!"

"I will go with you," she replied resolutely.

The gods were with us. The door leading to the cellars was not locked. I opened it, passed the girl before me, and closed the door.

"I am frightened!" she whispered.

"So am I," I offered, to reassure her. "You are not afraid of rats, are you?"

"No-o!"

"Bully!" I cried. Then I laughed.

"How *can* you laugh? It is horrible!" she protested.

"You would come, though I heard your uncle warn you. Look at it the way I do. It's a huge joke, and years from now you'll have great fun telling it to your grandchildren."

"I wish, at this moment, I could see so far ahead—What was that?"—seizing my arm.

Click!

Somebody had locked the door behind us!

IV

In other words, we had departed the scene of festivities none too soon. I could readily understand why the door had been locked: it was not to keep us in the cellars; rather it was to prevent any one from leaving the ball-room by that route. Evidently our absence had not been noticed, nor had any seen our precipitate flight. I sighed gratefully.

For several minutes we stood silent and motionless on the landing. At length I boldly struck a match. The first thing that greeted my blinded gaze was the welcome vision of a little shelf lined with steward's candles. One of these I lighted, and two others I stuffed into the pocket of my Capuchin's gown. Then we tiptoed softly down the stairs, the girl tugging fearfully at my sleeve.

There was an earthy smell. It was damp and cold. Miles and miles away (so it seemed) the pale moonshine filtered through a cobwebbed window. It *was* ghostly; but so far as I was concerned, I

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was honestly enjoying myself, strange as this statement may seem. Here was I, setting forth upon an adventure with the handsomest, wittiest girl I had ever laid eyes upon. If I extricated her neatly, she would always be in my debt; and the thought of this was mighty pleasant to contemplate.

"Do you know the way out?"

I confessed that, so far as I knew, we were in one of the fabled labyrinths of mythology.

"Go ahead," she said bravely.

"I ask only to die in your Highness' service,"—soberly.

"But I do not want you to die; I want you to get me out of this cellar; and quickly, too."

"I'll live or die in the attempt!"

"I see nothing funny in our predicament,"—icily.

"A few moments ago you said that our angles of vision were not the same; I begin to believe it. As for me, I think it's simply immense to find myself in the same boat with you."

"I wish you *had* been an anarchist, or a performer in a dime-museum."

"You might now be alone here. But, pardon me; surely you do not lack the full allotment of the

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adventurous spirit! It was all amusing enough to come here under false pretenses."

"But I had not reckoned on any one's losing jewels."

"No more had I."

"Proceed. I have the courage to trust to your guidance."

"I would that it might be always!"—with a burst of sentiment that was not wholly feigned.

"Let us be on,"—imperatively. "I shall not only catch my death of cold, but I shall be horribly compromised."

"My dear young lady, on the word of a gentleman, I will do the best I can to get you out of this cellar. If I have jested a little, it was only in the effort to give you courage; for I haven't the slightest idea how we are going to get out of this dismal hole."

We went on. We couldn't see half a dozen feet in front of us. The gloom beyond the dozen feet was Stygian and menacing. And the great grim shadows that crept behind us as we proceeded! Once the girl stumbled and fell against me.

"What's the matter?" I asked, startled.

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"I stepped on something that—that *moved!*"—plaintively.

"Possibly it was a potato; there's a bin of them over there. Where the deuce *are* we?"

"If you swear, I shall certainly scream!" she warned.

"But I can swear in the most elegant and approved fashion."

"I am not inclined to have you demonstrate your talents."

"Aha! Here is the coal-bin. Perhaps the window may be open. If so, we are saved. Will you hold the candle for a moment?"

Have you ever witnessed a cat footing it across the snow? If you have, picture me imitating her. Cautiously I took one step, then another; and then that mountain of coal turned into a roaring treadmill. Sssssh! Rrrrr! In a moment I was buried to the knees and nearly suffocated. I became angry. I would reach that window—

"Hush! Hush! The noise, the noise!" whispered the girl, waving the candle frantically.

But I was determined. Again I tried. This time I slipped and fell on my hands. As I strove to get up, the cord of my gown became tangled

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about my feet. The girl choked; whether with coal-dust or with laughter I could not say, as she still had on her cambric-mask.

"Forgive me," she said. And then I knew it was not the coal-dust.

"I'll forgive you, but I will not promise to forget."

"Merciful heavens! you must not try that again. Think of the noise!"

"Was I making any noise?"—rubbing the perspiration from my forehead. (I had taken off my mask.)

"Noise? The trump of Judgment Day will be feeble compared to it. Surely some one has heard you. Why not lay that board on top of the coal?"

A good idea. I made use of it at once. The window was unlatched, but there was a heavy wire-screen nailed to the sills outside. There was no getting out that way. The gods were evidently busy elsewhere.

"Nothing doing," I murmured, a bit discouraged.

"And even if there was, you really could not expect me to risk my neck and dignity by climbing

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through a window like that. Let us give up the idea of windows and seek the cellar-doors, those that give to the grounds. I declare I shall leave by no other exit."

"It was very kind of you to let me make an ass of myself like that. Why didn't you tell me beforehand?"

"Perhaps it's the angle of vision again. I can see that we shall never agree. Seriously, I thought that if you got out that way, you might find the other exit for me. I am sorry if my laughter annoyed you."

"Not at all, not at all. But wouldn't it be wise to save a little laughter to make merry with when we get out?"

I stepped out of the bin and relieved her of the candle; and we went on.

"You *did* look funny," she said.

"Please don't!" I begged.

Soon we came to a bin of cabbages. I peered in philosophically.

"I might find a better head in there than mine," I suggested.

"Now you are trying to be sarcastic," said the girl.

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We went on.

"Wait a moment!" she cried. "Here's a bin of nice apples."

Apples! Well, my word, she was a cool one! I picked up one, polished it on my sleeve, and gave it to her.

"I'm hungry," she said apologetically.

"And plucky, too," I supplemented admiringly. "Most women would be in a weeping state by this time."

"Perhaps I am waiting till it is all over."

"You had better take off your mask." In fact I felt positive that the sight of her exquisite face would act like a tonic upon my nerves.

"I am doing very well with it on. I can at least keep my face clean." She raised the curtain and took a liberal bite of the apple—so nonchalantly that I was forced to smile.

"Here's a box," said I; "let's sit down while we eat. We are safe enough. If any one had heard the racket in the coal-bin, the cellar would have been full of police by this time."

And there we sat, calmly munching the apples, for all the world as if the iron hand of the law





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wasn't within a thousand miles of us. It was all very amusing.

"Are—*are* you the man they are hunting for?" she asked abruptly.

"I never stole anything more terrible than green apples—and ripe ones"—with a nod toward the apple-bin.

"Pardon me! I feel very guilty in asking you such a question. You haven't told me your name."

"Haven't I? My name is Richard Comstalk. My friends call me Dickey."

"Dickey," she murmured. "It's a nice name."

"*Won't* you have another apple?" I asked impulsively.

"My appetite is appeased, thank you."

An idea came to me. "Hamilton said there were three tens of hearts. That meant that only one was out of order. Where did you get your card?"

"That I shall tell you—later."

"But are you really an impostor?"

"I should not be in this cellar else."

"You are very mystifying."

"For the present I prefer to remain so."

We tossed aside the apple-cores, rose, and went on. It was the longest cellar *I* ever saw. There

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seemed absolutely no end to it. The wine-cellar was walled apart from the main cellar, and had the semblance of a huge cistern with a door opening into it. As we passed it, the vague perfume of the grape drifted out to us.

"Let's have a bottle," I began.

"Mr. Comstalk!"

"By absent-treatment!" I hastened to add.

"You will make a capital comrade — if we ever get out of this cellar."

"Trust me for that!" I replied gaily. "Be careful; there's a pile of empty bottles, yearning to be filled with tomato-catsup. Give me your hand."

But the moment the little digits closed over mine, a thrill seized me, and I quickly bent my head and kissed the hand. It was wrong, but I could not help it. She neither spoke nor withdrew her hand; and my fear that she might really be offended vanished.

"We are nearly out of it," I said exultantly. "I see the cellar-stairs on ahead. If only those doors are open!"

"Heaven is merciful to the fool, and we are a pair," she replied, sighing gratefully. "It seems strange that nobody should be in the cellar on a

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night like this. Hark! They are playing again up stairs in the ball-room."

"And wondering a whole lot where that third ten of hearts has gone."

"But, listen. How are we to get back to the trolley? We certainly can not walk the distance in these clothes."

"Oh, that carryall will come to our rescue. We are weary and are leaving early, don't you know? That part is simple; the complicated thing is to shake the dust of this cellar."

"What a big furnace!" she exclaimed, as we came into view of the huge heating apparatus. "And there's more coal."

A man stepped out from behind the furnace, and confronted us. A red bandana covered the lower part of his face and his hat was pulled down over his eyes. But I recognized him instantly. It was the fellow with the villainous pipe! Something glittered ominously at the end of his outstretched arm.

"If you make any noise, sir, I'll have to plug you, sir," he said in polite but muffled tones.

The candle slipped from my fingers, and the three of us stood in darkness!

V

There was a clicking sound, and the glare of a dark-lantern struck my blinking eyes.

"Pick up the candle, sir," said the tranquil voice from behind the light.

I obeyed readily enough. Fate was downright cruel to us. Not a dozen feet away was liberty; and now we were back at the beginning again, with the end nowhere in sight.

"Shall I light it, sir?" I asked, not to be outdone in the matter of formal politeness.

"Yes, sir, doubtless you will need it."

I struck a match and touched the candle-wick.

"Burglar?" said I. (For all my apparent coolness, my heart-beats were away up in the eighties!)

The girl snuggled close to my side. I could feel her heart beating even faster than mine.

"Burglar?" I repeated.

"Indeed, no, sir,"—reproachfully. "Mine is a political job."

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"A political job?"—thunderstruck.

"Yes, sir; I am an inspector of cellars,"—grimly. "I couldn't get around to this here cellar earlier in the day, sir, and a fellow's work *must* be done."

Here was a burglar with the sense of humor.

"What can I do for you?" I asked blandly.

"Firstly, as they say, you might tell me what you and this lady *are* doing in this lonesome cellar."

"Say 'sir,' when you address me."

"Yes, sir."

"The lady and I were playing hide-and-seek."

"Nice game, sir,"—grinning. "Were you trying to hide under the coal?"

"Oh, no; I was merely exploring it."

"Say 'sir,' when you address me."

"Sir."

"You're a cool hand, sir."

"I am gratified to learn that our admiration is mutual. But what are *you* doing here?"

"I was ascertaining if the law was properly observed, sir," shaking with silent laughter.

"But what puzzles me," I went on, "is the fact that you could gather the gems in that garb."

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For I was positive that this was the Galloping Dick every one was looking for.

"I don't understand a word you say, sir. I'm an inspector of cellars, sir, not a jeweler. So you and the lady was playing hide-and-seek? Come, now, *what* is your graft? Is *all* the push here to-night?"

"That depends,"—cursing under my breath that I wore a gown which hampered my movements. For, truth to tell, I was watching him as a cat watches a mouse.

"Well, sir, we of the profession never interferes with gentlemanly jobs, sir. All I want of you is to help me out of here."

"I am not a burglar."

"Oh, I understand, sir; I understand completely. A gentleman is always a gentleman, sir. Now, you can return to that coal-bin. I was just about to make for it when you lit that candle."

"Why not leave by the cellar-doors?"

"I have my reasons, sir; most satisfactory reasons, sir. I prefer the window. Get along!"—his tones suddenly hardening.

I got along.

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"The lady may sit down, sir," he said courteously.

"Thank you, I will," replied the girl, plumping down on an empty winecase. (She afterward confessed that if she had not sat down on the box, she would have sat down on the cellar-floor, as a sort of paralysis had seized her knees.)

I stepped into the coal-bin, and rested the candle on the little shelf for that purpose. I was downright anxious to see the fellow safely away. There wasn't room in that cellar for the three of us. His presence doubly endangered us and multiplied the complications. I was in no position to force the gems from him. A man who has ten thousand dollars' worth of jewels on his person doesn't stop at shooting; and I possessed a healthy regard for my skin. I opened the window and caught it to the ceiling by a hook I found there.

"There is a stout screen, my man."

"Take this, sir, and cut it out,"—handing me a pair of wire-clippers, holding his lantern under his arm meanwhile. The muzzle of the revolver, during all this time, never wavered in its aim at my head.

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I went to work at the screen, and presently it fell inward.

"Is that satisfactory?"—with impressive irony.

"You are the most *perfect* gentleman that I ever see, sir!"

The girl laughed hysterically.

"Now what?" The fun was beginning to pall on me.

"Step out of the bin and stand aside. Sit down by the lady. Maybe she's a bit frightened."

I obeyed him to the letter.

"Thanks!" With the agility of a cat he leaped up and wriggled through the window. He turned. "Good night, sir. Sometime maybe I'll do the same for you, sir."

"Go to the devil!" I snarled.

"My, my! What a temper, sir! I wouldn't have thought it of you, and a nice lady in speaking distance!"

He disappeared.

The girl laid a hand on my arm.

"You have acted very sensibly, Mr. Comstalk. If you had not, it is quite certain he would have shot you."

"It would have been a good thing for me if he

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had. He has gone, and the jewels have gone with him. I hadn't the least chance; the wretch! He probably came disguised as a plumber, and nobody suspected him."

"But if he possessed the ten of hearts, why should he have left this way?"

"Possibly my idea was only an imitation of his. There must have been at least a dozen tens of hearts. My dear young lady, I would give a good deal if you were well out of this. I believed my plan was for the best, and instead I have simply blackened the case against us. I have been too adventurous. The situation looks very serious just now. Of course, in the long run, we shall clear ourselves; but it will take some fine arguing to do it, and possibly half a dozen lawyers."

"It is a terribly embarrassing predicament; but since we started out together, we'll hang together." She held out her hand to me. "It will be fun to extricate ourselves with full honors."

"You're a brick!" And I pressed her hand tightly.

"Now, I wonder why the burglar didn't try those cellar-doors?" she murmured.

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“By Jove, I’ll soon find out! Come on. There’s hope yet.”

This time we reached the stone steps without interference. I gave the candle to the girl, cautiously put a shoulder against one of the doors, and gave a gentle heave. It was not locked. Through the thin crack I looked out upon the bright world of moonshine and crystal. Instantly I permitted the door to settle into its accustomed place. I readily understood the burglar’s reasons. Seated upon a box, less than a dozen feet away, and blissfully smoking one of the club’s cigars, sat a burly policeman. So *they* had arrived upon the scene!

“What is it?” asked the girl, as I motioned her to retreat.

“The worst has come: the police!” dramatically.

“Gracious heavens, *this* is frightful! We shall never get out now. Oh dear! Why did I ever come? It will be in the papers, with horrid pictures. We ought not to have left the ball-room. Our very actions will tell heavily against us. Awful!”

“Now, don’t you worry. They will not take any notice of you, once they set eyes upon me.

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Homo sum! They are looking for *me*. There's only one superfluous ten of hearts. I have it."

"But I shall be found with you, and the stupid police will swear I am an accomplice." She wrung her hands.

"But no jewels will be found upon us," I argued half-heartedly.

"They will say we have already disposed of them."

"But the real burglar —"

"They will say that he came into the cellar at our bidding."

This girl was terribly reasonable and direct.

"Hang it! I know Teddy Hamilton, the M. F. H. He'll go my bail, and yours, too, for that matter. Come, let's not give up. There *must* be some other way out."

"I wish I might believe it. Why *did* I come?" — a bit of a wail stealing into the anger in her voice.

"This is Tom Fool's Night, and no mistake," I assented ruefully.

"But I am a bigger fool than you are; I *had* an alibi, and a good one."

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"An alibi? Why on earth, then, did you follow me? What is your alibi?"

"Never mind now. We should still be in this miserable cellar,"—briefly. "What a night! I am *so* ashamed! I shall be horribly compromised."

"I'll take the brunt of it all. I'm sorry; but, for the love of Heaven, don't cry, or I shall lose what little nerve I have left."

"I am not crying!" she denied emphatically. "My inclination is to shriek with laughter. I'm hysterical. And who wouldn't be, with police officers and cells staring one in the face? Let us be going. That policeman outside will presently hear us whispering if we stand here much longer."

There was wisdom in this. So, once again I took the candle, and we marched back. There wasn't a single jest left in my whole system, and it didn't look as if there was ever going to be another supply. We took the other side of the furnace, and at length came to a flight of wooden stairs, leading somewhere into the club. It was our last chance, or we should indeed be obliged to stay all night in some bin; for it would not be long before they searched the cellars. If this flight led into the kitchen, we were saved, for I

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could bluff the servants. We paused. Presently we ascended, side by side, with light but firm step. We reached the landing in front of the door without mishap. From somewhere came a puff of air which blew out the candle. I struck a match viciously against the wall — and blundered into a string of cooking-pans! It was all over, the agony of suspense!

Blang! Rumpity-bumpity-blanc-blanc!

I have heard many stage thunders in my time, but that racket beat anything and everything this side of siege-guns.

Instantly the door opened and a policeman poked his head in. Before I had time to move, he grabbed me by the arm and yanked me — into the ball-room! The girl and I had made a complete circuit of the cellars, and had stumbled into the ball-room again by the flight opposite to that by which we left it. Cheerful prospect, wasn't it? The adventure had ceased to have any droll side to it.

"Aha!" cried the base minion of the law. "*Here* you are, then! Hello, everybody! Hello!" he bawled.

Caught! Here we were, the Blue Domino and

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myself, the Grey Capuchin, both of us in a fine fix. Discovery and ejection I could have stood with fortitude and equanimity; but there was bad business afoot. There wasn't any doubt in my mind what was going to happen. As the girl said, there would be flaring head-lines and horrid pictures. We were like to be the newspaper sensation of the day. Arrested and lodged in jail! What would my rich, doting old uncle say to that, who had threatened to disinherit me for lesser things! I felt terribly sorry for the girl, but it was now utterly impossible to help her, for I couldn't help myself.

And behold! The mysterious stranger I had met in the curio-shop, the fellow who had virtually haunted me for six hours, the fellow who had masqueraded as Cæsar, suddenly loomed up before me, still wearing his sardonic smile. At his side were two more policemen. He had thrown aside his toga and was in evening dress. His keen glance rested on me.

"Here he is, Mr. Haggerty!" cried the policeman cheerfully, swinging me around.

A detective! And Heaven help me, he believed me to be the thief! Oh, for Aladdin's lamp!

VI

I stood with folded arms, awaiting his approach. Nonchalance is always respected by the police. I must have presented a likely picture, however — my face blackened with coal-dust, cobwebs stringing down over my eyes, my Capuchin gown soiled and rent. The girl quietly took her place beside me.

“So you took a chance at the cellars, eh?” inquired the detective urbanely. “Well, you look it. Will you go with us quietly, or shall we have to use force?”

“In the first place, what do you and your police want of *me*?” I returned coolly.

He exhibited his star of authority.

“I am Haggerty of the Central Office. I want you for several things.”

Several things? I stared at him stupidly. Several things? Then it came to me, with a jar like an earthquake. The story in the newspaper returned to my vision. Oh, this was too much, al-

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together too much! He took me to be the fashionable thief for whom half the New York police force were hunting. My sight swam for a moment in a blur.

"What is it you think I have done?" I demanded.

"You have, or have had, several thousand dollars' worth of gems on your person to-night."

I shrugged. The accusation was so impossible that my confidence returned.

"Mr. Haggerty, you are making a stupid mistake. You are losing time, besides. I am not the man for whom you are hunting. My name is Richard Comstalk."

"One name or another, it does not matter."

"Plenty of gall," murmured one of the minions of the law, whom I afterward learned was the chief of the village police.

"The card by which you gained admittance here," demanded the great Haggerty truculently.

I surrendered it. A crowd had by this time collected curiously about us. I could see the musicians on the stage peering over the plants.

"The thief you are looking for has gone," said

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I. "He escaped by the coal-window." By this statement my feet sank deeper still.

"What did I tell you?" cried Haggerty, turning to his men. "They had an accomplice hidden in the cellars."

"I beg to inform you that you are making a mistake that will presently cost you dear,"—thinking of the political pull my uncle had in New York. "I am the nephew of Daniel Wither-spoon."

"Worse and worse!" said the chief of police.

"We shall discuss the mistake later and at length. Of course you can easily explain how you came to impose upon these people,"—ironically. "Bah! the game is up. When you dropped that card in Friard's and said you were going to a masquerade, I knew your game in a minute, and laid eyes upon you for the first time since I began the chase. I've been after you for weeks. Your society dodge has worked out, and I'll land you behind the bars for some time to come, my gay boy. Come,"—roughly.

"I request Mr. Hamilton to be called. He will prove to you that you are greatly mistaken." Everything looked pretty black, I can tell you.

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"You will see whom you please, but only after you are safely landed in the lockup. Now, Madame,"—turning swiftly upon the Blue Domino, "what is your part in this fine business?"

"It certainly has no part in yours,"—icily.

Haggerty smiled. "My skin is very thick. Do you know this fellow?"

She shook her head. He stood undecided for a space.

"Let me see your card."

"I decline to produce it,"—haughtily.

Haggerty seemed staggered for a moment. "I am sorry to annoy you, but you must be identified at once."

"And why?"—proudly. "Was it forbidden to go into the club cellars for such harmless things as apples?"

Apples! I looked at her admiringly.

"Apples?" repeated Haggerty. "Couldn't you have sent a servant for them?"

She did not reply.

"You were with this clever gentleman in the cellars. You may or may not be acquainted with him. I do not wish to do anything hasty in regard to yourself, but your position is rather equi-

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vocal. Produce your card and be identified — if you really can."

"I refuse!"

"Then I shall ask you to accompany us to the room up stairs till the police-patrol arrives."

"I will go,"—quietly.

"Nonsense!" I objected. "On my word of honor, I do not know this lady. Our presence in the cellar was perfectly harmless. There is no valid reason for detaining her. It is an outrage!"

"I am not going to stand here arguing with you," said Haggerty. "Let the lady produce her card; let her disclose her identity. That is simple enough."

"I have already given you my determination on that subject," replied the girl. "I can very well explain my presence here, but I absolutely decline to explain it to the police."

I didn't understand her at all. She had said that she possessed an alibi. Why didn't she produce it?

So the two of us left the gorgeous ball-room. Every one moved aside for us, and quickly, too, as if we had had the plague. I looked in vain for Hamilton. He was a friend in need. We were

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taken into the steward's office and the door was shut and locked. The band in the ball-room went galloping through a two-step, and the gaiety was in full swing again. The thief had been rounded up! How the deuce was it going to end?

"I can not tell you how sorry I am to have mixed you up in this," I said to the girl.

"You are in no manner to blame. Think of what *might* have happened had you blown up the post-office!"

She certainly was the least embarrassed of the two of us. I addressed my next remarks to the great Haggerty.

"Did you find a suitable pistol in Friard's?"

"A man in my business," said Haggerty mildly, "is often found in such places. There are various things to be recovered in pawnshops. The gentlemen of this club sent *me* the original ten of hearts, my presence being necessary at such big entertainments. And when I saw that card of yours, I was so happy that I nearly put you on your guard. Lord, how long I've been looking for you! I give you credit for being a clever rascal. You have fooled us all nicely. Not a soul among us knew your name, nor what you looked like.

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And but for that card, you might still be at large. Until the lady submits to the simple process of identification, I shall be compelled to look upon her and treat her as an accomplice. She has refused the offer I have made her, and she can not blame me if I am suspicious, when to be suspicious is a part of my business." He was reasonable enough in regard to the girl.

He turned to the chief of the village police, who was sitting at the desk ordinarily used by the club's steward.

"No reporters, mind you."

"Yes, sir. We'll see that no reporter gets wind of the capture."

The telephone bell rang. One of the police answered it.

"For you, Mr. Haggerty," he said.

Haggerty sprang to the telephone and placed the receiver to his ear.

"What?" we heard him exclaim. "You have got the other fellow? A horse and carriage at once!"

"Take mine," said the chief excitedly. "What is it?"

"My subordinate at the railway station has just

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landed the fellow with the jewels. Mighty quick work. I must hustle into town at once. There'll be plenty of time to attend to these persons. Bring them to town the moment the patrol arrives. The gems are the most important things just now."

"Yes, sir. You can rely upon us, Mr. Haggerty. Billy, go down with Mr. Haggerty and show him my rig."

"Good!" said Haggerty. "It's been a fine night's work, my lads, a fine night's work. I'll see that all get some credit. Permit no one to approach the prisoners without proper authority."

"Your orders shall be obeyed to the letter," said the chief importantly. He already saw his name figuring in the New York papers as having assisted in the capture of a great thief.

I cursed under my breath. If it hadn't been for the girl, I am ashamed to confess, I should have cursed out loud. She sat rigid and motionless. It must have been a cruel ordeal for her. But what was puzzling me was the fact that she made not the slightest effort to spring her alibi. If I had had one! Where was Hamilton? I scarcely inclined to the idea of sleeping in jail in a dress-suit.

Haggerty departed. A silence settled gloomily

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down on us. Quarter of an hour passed. The grim-visaged police watched us vigilantly. Half an hour, three-quarters, an hour. Far away we heard the whistle of an out-going train. Would I had been on it! From time to time we heard faint music. At length there was a noise outside the door, and a moment later Hamilton and two others came in. When he saw me, he stopped, his eyes bulging and his mouth agape.

"Dicky Comstalk?" he cried helplessly. "What the devil does this mean?"—turning to the police.

"Do you know this fellow, Mr. Hamilton?" asked the chief.

"Know him? Of course I know him," answered Teddy; "and I'll stake my last dollar on his honesty."

(Thanks, Teddy!) I began to breathe.

"But—" began the chief, seized with sudden misgivings.

"It is impossible, I tell you," interrupted Hamilton. "I know this gentleman is incapable of the theft. There is some frightful mistake. How the dickens did you get here, Dicky?"

And briefly I told him my story, my ass's ears

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growing inch by inch as I went along. Hamilton didn't know whether to swear or to laugh; finally he laughed.

"If you wanted to come, why didn't you write me for an invitation?"

"I shouldn't have come to your old ball, had I been invited. It was just the idea of the lark."

"We shall have to hold him, nevertheless," said the chief, "till everything is cleared up. The girl—"

Hamilton looked at the Blue Domino.

"Madame, will you do me the honor to raise your mask?"

She did so; and I saw Hamilton draw in his breath. Her beauty was certainly of an exquisite pattern. He frowned anxiously.

"I never saw this young woman before," he admitted slowly.

"Ha!" cried the chief, glad to find some one culpable.

"Did you receive your invitation through the proper channels?" asked Hamilton.

"I came here to-night," — coldly, "on the invitation of Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds, who sailed for Europe Wednesday."

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Here was an alibi that *was* an alibi! I was all at sea. Hamilton bowed; the chief coughed worriedly behind his hand. The girl had told me she was an impostor like myself, that her ten of hearts was as dark-stained as my own. I could not make head or tail to it. Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds! She was a law in the land, especially in Blankshire, the larger part of which she owned. What did it all mean? And what was her idea in posing as an impostor?

The door opened again.

"The patrol has come," said the officer who entered.

"Let it wait," growled the chief. "Haggerty has evidently got us all balled up. I don't believe his fashionable thief has materialized at all; just a common crook. Well, he's got *him*, at any rate, and the gems."

"You have, of course, the general invitation?" said Hamilton.

"Here it is," — and she passed the engraved card to him.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" said Hamilton humbly. "Everything seems to have gone wrong."

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"Will you guarantee this man?" asked the chief of Hamilton, nodding toward me.

"I have said so. Mr. Comstalk is very well known to me. He is a retired army officer, and to my knowledge a man with an income sufficient to put him far beyond want."

"What is your name?" asked the chief of the girl, scowling. It was quite evident he couldn't understand her actions any better than I.

"Alice Hawthorne," with an oblique glance at me.

I had been right!

"What is your occupation? I am obliged to ask these questions, Miss."

"I am a miniature painter," — briefly.

Hamilton came forward. "Alice Hawthorne? Pardon me, but are you the artist who recently completed the miniatures of the Emperor of Germany, the Princess of Hesse, and Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds?"

"I am. I believe there is no further reason for detaining me."

"Emperor of Germany?" echoed the now bewildered chief. "Why didn't you tell all this to Mr. Haggerty?"

"I had my reasons."

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Once again the door opened. A burly man in a dark business-suit entered. His face ruddy and his little grey eyes sparkled with suppressed ire. He reminded me of Vautrin, the only difference being that Vautrin was French while this man was distinctly Irish. His massive shoulders betrayed tremendous strength. He was vastly angry about something. He went to the chief's desk and rested his hands upon it.

"You are a nice specimen for a chief of police, you are!" he began.

"And who the devil are *you*?" bawled the chief, his choler rising.

"I'll tell you who I am presently."

We all eyed him in wonder. What was going to happen now?

"Which of you gentlemen is Mr. Hamilton?" asked the new-comer gruffly.

Hamilton signified that he was the gentleman by that name.

"Some ladies at your ball have been robbed of their diamonds, I understand?"

"About ten thousand dollars' worth."

"Look here, sir," cried the chief, standing up and balling his fist, "I want you to explain your-

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self, and mighty quick. You can't come into my presence in this manner."

"Bah! You have just permitted the cleverest rascal in the state to slip through your butter-fingers. *I* am Haggerty."

The chief of police sat down suddenly.

VII

The consummate daring of it! Why, the rascal ought to have been in command of an army. On the Board of Strategy he would have been incomparable!

There followed a tableau that I shall not soon forget. We all stared at the real Haggerty much after the fashion of Medusa's victims. Presently the tension relaxed, and we all sighed. I sighed because the thought of jail for the night in a dress-suit dwindled in perspective; the girl sighed for the same reason and one or two other things; the chief of the village police and his officers sighed because darkness had suddenly swooped down on them; and Hamilton sighed because there were no gems. Haggerty was the one among us who didn't sigh. He scowled blackly.

This big athlete looked like a detective, and the abrupt authority of his tones convinced me that he *was*. Haggerty was celebrated in the annals of police affairs; he had handled all sorts of crim-

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inals, from titled impostors down to petty thieves. He was not a man to trifle with, mentally or physically, and for this reason we were all shaking in our boots. He owned to a keen but brutal wit; to him there was no such thing as sex among criminals, and he had the tenacity of purpose that has given the bulldog considerable note in the pit. But it was quite plain that for once he had met his match.

"I don't see how you can blame me," mumbled the chief. "None of us was familiar with your looks, and he showed us his star of authority, and went to work in a business-like way — By George! and he has run away with my horse and carriage!" — starting from his chair.

"Never mind the horse. You'll find it safe at the railway station," snarled Haggerty. "Now, then, tell me everything that has happened, from beginning to end."

And the chief recounted the adventure briefly. Haggerty looked coldly at me and shrugged his broad shoulders. As for the girl, he never gave her so much as a single glance. *He* knew a gentlewoman without looking at her twice.

"Humph! Isn't he a clever one, though?"

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cried Haggerty, in a burst of admiration. "Clever is no name for it. I'd give a year of my life to come face to face with him. It would be an interesting encounter. Hunted him for weeks, and to-day laid eyes on him for the first time. Had my clumsy paws on him this very afternoon. He seemed so willing to be locked up that I grew careless. Biff! and he and his accomplice, an erstwhile valet, had me trussed like a chicken and bundled into the clothes-press. Took my star, credentials, playing-card, and invitation. It was near eleven o'clock when I roused the housekeeper. I telegraphed two hours ago."

"Telegraphed!" exclaimed the chief, rousing himself out of a melancholy dream. (There would be no mention of him in the morrow's papers.)

"Yes, telegraphed. The despatch lay unopened on your office-desk. You're a good watch-dog — for a hen-coop!" growled Haggerty. "Ten thousand in gems to-night, and by this time he is safe in New York. You are all a pack of block-heads.

"Used the telephone, did he? Told you to hold these innocent persons till he went somewhere to land the accomplice, eh? The whistle of the train

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meant nothing to you. Well, that whistle ought to have told you that there might be a mistake. A good officer never quits his prisoners. If there is an accomplice in toils elsewhere, he makes them bring him *in*, he does not go *out* for him. And now I've got to start all over again, and he in New York, a bigger catacomb than Rome ever boasted of. He's not a common thief; nobody knows who he is or what his haunts are. But I have seen his face; I'll never forget him."

The chief tore his hair, while his subordinates shuffled their feet uneasily. Then they all started in to explain their theories. But the detective silenced them with a wave of his huge hand.

"I don't want to hear any explanations. Let these persons go," he commanded, with a jerk of his head in our direction. "You can all return to town but one officer. I may need a single man," Haggerty added thoughtfully.

"What are you going to do?" asked the chief.

"Never you mind. I have an idea; it may be a good one. If it is, I'll telephone you all about it when the time comes."

He stepped over to the telephone and called up central. He spoke so low that none of us over-

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heard what he said; but he hung up the receiver, a satisfied smile on his face.

The girl and I were free to go whither we listed, and we listed to return at once to New York. Hamilton, however, begged us to remain, to dance and eat, as a compensation for what we had gone through; but Miss Hawthorne resolutely shook her head; and as there was nothing in the world that would have induced me to stay without her, I shook my head, too. It seemed to me I had known this girl all my life, so closely does misfortune link one life to another. I had seen her for the first time less than eight hours before; and yet I was confident that as many years, under ordinary circumstances, would not have taught me her real worth.

"Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds will never forgive me," said Hamilton dismally, "if she hears that I've been the cause, indirectly and innocently, of turning you away."

"Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds need never know," replied the girl, smiling inscrutably. "In fact, it would be perfectly satisfactory and agreeable to me if she never heard at all."

"I will call a conveyance for you," said the de-

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feated M. F. H. "I shall never forgive you, Dicky."

"Yes, you will, Teddy. A loving-cup, the next time we meet at the club, will mellow everything."

Quarter of an hour later Miss Hawthorne and I, wrapped in buffalo-robcs, our feet snugly stowed away in straw, slid away, to the jangle and quarrel of sleighbells, toward Moriarty's Hollywood Inn. The moon shone; not a cloud darkened her serene and lovely countenance. The pearly whiteness of the world would have aroused the poetry in the most sordid soul; and far, far away to the east the black, tossing line of the sea was visible.

"What a beautiful night!" I volunteered.

"The beginning of the end."

"The beginning of the end? What does that mean?"

"Why, when you first spoke to me, it was about the weather."

"Oh, but this isn't going to be the end; this is the true beginning of all things."

"I wish I could see it in that light; but we can not see beauty in anything when hunger lies back of the eyes. I haven't had anything to eat, save that single apple, for hours and hours. I was so

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excited at Mouquin's that I ate almost nothing."

"You are hungry? Well, we'll fix that when we get to Moriarty's. I'll find a way of waking him up, in case he's asleep, which I doubt. There will be cold chicken and ham and hot coffee."

"Lovely!"

"And we shall dine with the gods. And now it is all over and done, it *was* funny, wasn't it?"

"Terribly funny!" — with a shade of irony. "It would have been funnier still if the real Haggerty hadn't turned up. The patrol had arrived."

"But it didn't happen. I shall never forget this night," — romantically.

"I should be inordinately glad to forget it completely," — decidedly.

"Where's your romance?" I asked.

"I'd rather have it served to me between book-covers. As I grow older my love of repose increases."

"Do you know," I began boldly, "it seems that I have known you all my life."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Why, I might really have known you all my life, and still not have known you as well as I do this very minute,— and less than a dozen hours

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between this and our first meeting. You are as brave as a paladin, wise as a serpent, cool, witty — and beautiful!”

“ Shall I ask the driver to let me out? ” Then she laughed, a rollicking, joyous laugh.

“ What is so funny? ”

“ I was thinking of that coal-bin.”

“ Well, I didn’t permit a lonely potato to frighten me,” I retorted.

“ No, you were brave enough — among the potatoes.”

“ You *are* beautiful! ”

“ I am hungry.”

“ You are the most beautiful girl — ”

“ I want something to eat.”

“ — I ever saw! Do you think it possible for a man to fall in love at first sight? ”

“ Oh, nothing is impossible on Tom Fool’s night. Positive, fool; comparative, fooler; superlative, fooliest. You are marching on with your degrees, Mr. Comstalk.”

“ You might call me Dicky,” I said in an ag-grieved tone.

“ Dicky? Never! I should always be thinking of paper collars.”

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"I wish *I* were witty like that!"

She snuggled down beneath the robes.

An artist's model, thought I. Never in this world. I now understood the drift of her uncle's remark about her earning capacity. The Alice Hawthorne miniatures brought fabulous prices. And here I was, sitting so close to her that our shoulders touched: and she a girl who knew intimately emperors and princesses and dukes, not to mention the worldly-rich. I admit that for a moment I was touched with awe. And it was beginning to get serious. This girl interested me marvelously. I summoned up all my courage.

"Are — are you married?"

"No-o."

"Nor engaged to be married?"

"No-o. But you mustn't ask all these questions."

"How would you like to ride around in a first-class motor-car the rest of your days?"

She laughed merrily. Possibly it *was* funny.

"Are you always amusing like this?"

"Supposing I were serious?"

"In that case I should say you had not yet slipped off your fool's motley."

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This directness was discouraging.

"I wonder if the ten of hearts is lucky, after all," I mused.

"We are not in jail. I consider that the best of good fortune."

"Give me your card," said I.

She gave me the card, and I put it with mine.

"Why do you do that?"

"Perhaps I want to bring about an enchantment,"—soberly.

"As Signor Fantoccini, or as Mr. Comstalk?"

"I have long since resigned my position in the museum; it was too exciting."

She made no rejoinder; and for some time there was no sound but the music of the bells.

Finally we drew up under the colonial portè-cochere of Hollywood Inn and were welcomed by the genial Moriarty himself, his Celtic countenance a mirror of smiles.

"Anything in the house to eat?" I cried, shaking the robes from me.

"Anything ye like, if you like cowld things. I can hate ye a pot of coffee on the gasoline-burner, and there's manny a vintage in the cillars."

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"That will be plenty!"— joyfully, helping Miss Hawthorne to alight.

"Sure, and ye are from the Hunt Club!"— noting our costumes. "Well, well! They niver have anny too much grub. Now, I'll putt ye in a little room all be yersilves, with a windy and a log-fire; cozy as ye plaze. Ye'll have nearly two hours to wait for the car-r from the village."

We entered the general assembly-room. It was roomy and quaint, and somewhere above us was the inevitable room in which George Washington had slept. The great hooded fireplace was merry with crackling logs. Casually I observed that we were not alone. Over yonder, in a shadowed corner, sat two men, very well bundled up, and, to all appearances, fast asleep. Moriarty lighted a four-branched candelabrum and showed us the way to the little private dining-room, took our orders, and left us.

"This is romance," said I. "They used to do these things hundreds of years ago, and everybody had a good time."

"It is now all very wicked and improper," murmured the girl, laying aside her domino for the

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first time; "but delightful! I now find I haven't the least bit of remorse for what I have done."

In that dark evening gown she was very beautiful. Her arms and shoulders were tinted like Carrara marble; and I knew instantly that I was never going to recover. I drew two chairs close to the grate. I sat down in one and she in the other. With a contented sigh she rested her blue-slipped feet on the brass fender.

"My one regret is that I haven't any shoes. What an adventure!"

"It's fine!" Two hours in the society of this enchanting creature! It was almost too good to be true. Ah, if it might always be like this — to return home from the day's work, to be greeted warmly by a woman as beautiful as this one! I sighed loudly.

Moriarty came with the chicken and ham and coffee.

"If ye would like, it won't be a bit of trouble to show ye George Washington's room; or" — with inimitable Irish drollery — "I can tell ye that he dined in this very room."

"That will serve," smiled the girl; and Moriarty bowed himself out.





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His departure was followed by the clatter of silver upon porcelain. Of a truth, both of us were hungry.

"I was simply ravenous," the girl confessed.

"And as for me, I never dreamt I could be so unromantic. Now," said I, pushing aside my plate, and dropping sugar into my coffee, and vainly hunting in my pockets for a cigar, "there remains only one mystery to be cleared up."

"And what might this mystery be?" she asked.

"The whereabouts of the bogus Haggerty?"

"The bogus Haggerty will never cross our paths again. He has skipped by the light of the moon. No, that's not the mystery. Why did you tell me you were an impostor; why did you go to the cellars with me, when all the while you were at the ball on Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds' invitation?"

She leaned on her elbows and smiled at me humorously.

"Would you really like to know, Signor? Well, I *was* an impostor." She sat with her back to the fire, and a weird halo of light seemed to surround her and frame her. "Mrs. Hyphen-Bonds accidentally dropped that invitation in my studio, a few days before she sailed for Europe. I simply

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could not resist the temptation. That is all the mystery there is."

"And they still think you were there rightfully!"

"You are no longer mystified?"

"Yes; there is yet another mystery to solve: myself." I knew it. Without rhyme or reason, I was in love; and without rhyme or reason, I was glad of it.

"Shall you ever be able to solve such a mystery?"—quizzically.

"It all depends upon you."

"Mr. Comstalk, you will not mar the exquisite humor of our adventure by causing me any annoyance. I am sure that some day we shall be very good friends. But one does not talk of love on eight hours' acquaintance. Besides, you would be taking advantage of my helplessness; for I really depend upon you to see me safe back to New York. It is only the romance, the adventure; and such moonlight nights often superinduce sentimentality. What do you know of me? Nothing. What do I know of you? Nothing, save that there is a kindred spirit which is always likely to lead us into trouble. Down in your heart you know you are

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only temporarily affected by moonshine. Come, make me a toast!"—lifting her cup.

"You are right," said I. "I am a gentleman. But it was only consistent that, having been the fool, I should now play the ass. Here's!"—and I held up my cup.

But neither of us drank; there wasn't time.

For the door opened quietly, and in walked the two men we had seen upon entering the Inn. One of them gently closed the door and locked it. One was in soiled every-day clothes, the other in immaculate evening dress. The latter doffed his opera hat with the most engaging smile imaginable. The girl and I looked up at him in blank bewilderment, and set our cups down so mechanically that the warm amber liquid splattered on the tablecloth.

Galloping Dick and the affable inspector of the cellars stood before us!

VIII

"The unexpected always happens," began the pseudo-detective, closing his hat, drawing off his gloves and stuffing them into a pocket. "As a friend of mine used to say, it is the unexpected that always surprises us. We never expected to see these charming masqueraders again, did we, William?"

"No, sir," said William, grinning affably, "we didn't. The gentleman was very nice and obliging to me, sir, when I was in the cellars."

"So I understand. Now," continued the late Mr. Haggerty, with the deadly affability of a Macaire, "I beg of you, Mr. Comstalk, I beg of you not to move or to become unduly excited. Physicians tell us that excitement wastes the red corpuscles, that is to say, the life of the blood."

"Your blood, sir, must be very thin," I returned coolly. But I cursed him soundly in my mind. William's bulging side-pocket convinced me that

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any undue excitement on my part would be exceedingly dangerous.

"William, you can always tell a gentleman," said the chief rogue admiringly. "A gentleman always recognizes his opportunities, and never loses his sense of the balance of things."

"And he is usually witty, too, sir," William assented.

The girl sat pale and rigid in her chair.

"What do you want?" I demanded savagely.

"For one thing, I should like to question the propriety of a gentleman's sitting down to dine with a lady without having washed his face. The coal-dust does not add to your manly beauty. You haven't a cake of soap about you, William, have you?"

"No, sir." William's face expressed indescribable enjoyment of the scene.

The girl's mouth stiffened. She was struggling to repress the almost irresistible smile that tickled her lips.

"In times like these," said I, determined not to be outdone, "we are often thoughtless in regard to our personal appearances. I apologize to the lady."

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"Fine, fine! I sincerely admire you, Mr. Comstalk. You have the true spirit of adventure. Hasn't he, William?"

"He certainly has, sir."

"Comes to a private ball without an invitation, and has a merry time of it indeed. To have the perfect sense of humor — that is what makes the world go round."

"Aren't you taking extra risk in offering me these pleasantries?" I asked.

"Risks? In what manner?"

"The man you so cleverly impersonated is at the club." I do not know what prompted me to put him on his guard.

The rogue laughed lightly. "I know Mr. Haggerty's habits. He is hustling back to New York as fast as he can. He passed here ten minutes ago in the patrol, lickety-clip! He wishes to warn all pawnbrokers and jewelers to be on the lookout for me to-morrow. Ten thousand in a night!" — jovially.

"A *very* tidy sum, sir," said William.

"A fourth of which goes to you, my good and faithful friend."

"Thank you, sir," replied William.

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Two cooler rogues I never wish to meet!

"But wouldn't it be well, sir, to hasten?" asked William.

"We have plenty of time now, my son."

"You have not entered this room," said the girl, her terror slipping from her, "simply to offer these banalities. What do you wish?"

"What perspicacity, William!" cried the rogue, taking out a cigarette case.

"I don't know what that word means, sir, but as you do, it seems to fit the occasion proper enough."

"It means, William, that this charming young lady scents our visit from afar."

"I had a suspicion, sir, that it might mean that." William leaned against the wall, his beady eyes twinkling merrily.

The master rogue lighted a cigarette at one of the candles.

"Pardon me," he said, "but will you join me?" — proffering the handsome gold case.

I took a cigarette and fired it. (I really wanted it.) I would show up well before this girl if I died for it. I blew a cloud of smoke at the candle-

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flame. There *was* a sparkle of admiration in the girl's eyes.

"Mr. Comstalk, my respect for you increases each moment." The rogue sat down.

"And to whom might this handsome case belong?" I asked, examining it closely.

"Oh, that has always been mine. There was a time,"—blowing rings at the candelabrum,—
"when I was respected like yourself, rich, sought after. A woman and a trusted friend: how these often tumble down our beautiful edifices! Yes, I *am* a scamp, a thief, a rogue; but not because I need the money. No,"—with retrospective eyes —
"I need excitement, tremendous and continuous,—excitement to keep my vigilance and invention active day and night, excitement to obliterate memory.

"But we can't do it, my friend, we can't do it. Memory is always with us. She is an impartial Nemesis; she dogs the steps of the righteous and the unrighteous. To obliterate memory, that is it! And where might I find this obliteration, save in this life? Drugs? Pah! Oh, I have given Haggerty a royal chase. It has been meat and drink to me to fool the cleverest policeman in New York.

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Till yesterday my face, as a criminal, was unknown to any man or woman, save William here, who was my valet in the old days. I have gone to my clubs, dined, played billiards; a fine comedy, a fine comedy! To-morrow William and I sail for Europe. Miss Hawthorne, you wear one of the most exquisite rubies I have ever seen. Permit me to examine it."

The girl tore the ring from her finger and flung it on the table. I made a move as though to push back my chair.

"I wouldn't do it, sir," warned William quietly. My muscles relaxed.

"Do not commit any rash action, Mr. Comstalk," said the girl, smiling bravely into my eyes. "This gentleman would not appreciate it."

The master rogue picked up the ring and rolled it lovingly about his palms.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he murmured. "Finest pigeon-blood, too. It is easily worth a thousand. Shall I give you my note of exchange for it?"—humorously. The girl scorned to reply. He took out a little chamois bag and emptied its contents on the table. How they sparkled, scintillated, glowed; thousands in the whitest of stones!

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How he ever had got his fingers on them is something I shall never learn. "Aren't they just beautiful?" he asked naïvely. "Can you blame me for coveting them?" He set the ruby on top of the glittering heap. It lay there like a drop of blood. Presently he caught it up and — presented it to the girl, who eyed him in astonishment. "I only wanted to look at it," he said courteously. "I like your grit as much as I admire your beauty. Keep the ring."

She slipped it mechanically over her finger.

"But you, my dear Mr. Comstalk!" he cried, turning his shining eyes upon me, while his fingers deftly replaced the gems in the bag.

"I have no jewelry," I replied, tossing aside the cigarette.

"But you have something infinitely better. I am rather observant. In Friard's curio-shop you carelessly exhibited a wallet that was simply choking to death with long yellow-boys. You have it still. Will you do me the honor?" — stretching out his slim white hand.

I looked at William; he nodded. There wasn't the slightest chance for me to argue. So I drew out my wallet. I extracted the gold-bills and

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made a neat little packet of them. It hurt, hurt like the deuce, to part with them. But —!

“Game, William, isn’t he? Most men would have flung the wallet at my head.”

“Oh, he *is* game, sir; never you doubt it, sir,” said the amiable William.

“I have some silver in change,” I suggested with some bitterness.

“Far be it that I should touch silver,” he said generously, did this rogue. “Besides, you will need something to pay for this little supper and the fare back to New York.” My bills disappeared into his pocket. “You will observe that I trust you implicitly. I haven’t even counted the money.”

William sniggered.

“And is there anything further?” I inquired. The comedy was beginning to weary me, it was so one-sided.

“I am in no particular hurry,” the rogue answered, his sardonic smile returning. “It is so long since I have chatted with people of my kind.”

I scowled.

“Pardon me, I meant from a social point of

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view only. I admit we would not be equals in the eye of the Presbyter."

And then followed a scene that reminds me to this day of some broken, fantastic dream, a fragment from some bewildering nightmare.





IX

For suddenly I saw his eyes widen and flash with anger and apprehension. Quick as a passing sunshadow, his hand swept the candelabrum from the table. He made a swift backward spring toward the door, but he was a little too late. The darkness he had created was not intense enough, for there was still the ruddy glow from the logs; and the bosom of his dress-shirt made a fine target. Besides, the eyes that had peered into the window were accustomed to the night.

Blang! The glass of the window shivered and jingled to the floor, and a sharp report followed. The rogue cried out in fierce anguish, and reeled against the wall. William whipped out his revolver, but, even from his favorable angle, he was not quick enough. The hand that had directed the first bullet was ready to direct the second.

All this took place within the count of ten. The girl and I sat stiffly in our chairs, as if petrified, it was all so swiftly accomplished.

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"Drop it!" said a cold, authoritative voice, and I saw the vague outlines of Haggerty's face beyond the broken window-pane.

William knew better than to hesitate. His revolver struck the floor dully, and a curse rolled from his lips. Immediately a heavy body precipitated itself against the door, which crashed inward, and an officer fearlessly entered, a revolver in each hand. This tableau, which lasted fully a minute, was finally disturbed by the entrance of Haggerty himself.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss," he said heartily; "it's all over. I'm sorry for the bullet, but it had to be done. The rascal has nothing more serious than a splintered bone. I am a dead shot. A fine night!"—triumphantly. "It's been a long chase, and I never was sure of the finish. You're the cleverest rogue it has been my good fortune to meet this many a day. I don't even know who you are yet. Well, well! we'll round that up in time."

Not till the candles again sputtered with light, and William was securely handcuffed and disarmed, did I recollect that I possessed the sense of motion. The smoke of powder drifted across the

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flickering candles, and there was a salty taste on my tongue.

"Horrible!" cried the girl, covering her eyes.

The master rogue and his valet were led out into the assembly-room, and we reluctantly followed. I saw it all now. When Haggerty called up central at the club, he ascertained where the last call had been from, and, learning that it came from Hollywood Inn, he took his chance. The room was soon filled with servants and stable-hands, the pistol-shot having lured them from their beds. The wounded man was very pale. He sat with his uninjured hand tightly clasped above the ragged wound, and a little pool of blood slowly formed at his side on the floor. But his eyes shone brightly.

"A basin of water and some linen!" cried the girl to Moriarty. "And send all these people away."

"To yer rooms, ivery one of ye!" snapped Moriarty, sweeping his hands. "'Tis no place for ye, be off!" He hurried the servants out of the room, and presently returned with a basin of water, some linen and balm.

We watched the girl as she bathed and bandaged the wounded arm; and once or twice the patient

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smiled. Haggerty looked on approvingly, and in William's eyes there beamed the gentle light of reverence. It *was* a picture to see this lovely creature playing the part of the good Samaritan, moving here and there in her exquisite gown. Ah, the tender mercy! I knew that, come what might, I had strangely found the right woman, the one woman.

"You're a good little woman," said the rogue, his face softening; "and a good woman is the finest thing God ever placed upon earth. Had I only found one!" He turned whimsically toward me. "Are you engaged to marry this little woman?"

"No."

"Surely you love her!"

"Surely I do!" I looked bravely at the girl as I spoke.

But she never gave any sign that she heard. She pinned the ends of the bandages carefully.

"And what brought you to this?" asked Haggerty, looking down at his prisoner.

The prisoner shrugged.

"You've the making of a fine man in you,"

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went on Haggerty generously. "What caused you to slip up?"

"That subject is taboo," replied the thief. "But I want to beg your pardon for underestimating your cunning."

"It was all due to a chance shot at the telephone."

"I kept you guessing."

"Merrily, too. My admiration is wholly yours, sir," returned Haggerty, picking up the telephone exchange-book. He rang and placed his lips to the transmitter, calling a number. "Hello! Is this the chief of the Blankshire police? Yes? Well, this is Haggerty. That idea I hinted to you was a mighty good one. Prepare two strong cells and have a doctor on hand. What? Oh, you will find your horse and carriage at Moriarty's. Good-by!"

My money was handed over to me. I returned it to my wallet, but without any particular enthusiasm.

"It's a bad business, William," said I.

"It's all in the game, sir,"—with a look at Haggerty that expressed infinite hatred. "In our business we can't afford to be careless."

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"Or to talk too much," supplemented his master, smiling. "Talk, my friend, rounds me up with a bullet in the arm, and a long sojourn behind stone walls. Never talk. Thank you, Miss Hawthorne, and you, too, Mr. Comstalk, for the saving grace of humor. If it were possible, I should like to give Miss Hawthorne the pick of the jewels. This is a sordid world."

"Ye'er car-r is coming!" shouted Moriarty, running to the window.

So the girl and I passed out of Hollywood Inn, leaving Haggerty with his mysterious prisoners. I can't reason it out, even to this day, but I was genuinely sorry that Haggerty had arrived upon the scene. For one thing, he had spoiled the glamour of the adventure by tingeing it with blood. And on the way to the car I wondered what had been the rogue's past, what had turned him into this hardy, perilous path. He had spoken of a woman; perhaps that was it. They are always behind good actions and bad. Heigh-ho!

Once we were seated in the lonely car, the girl broke down and cried as if her heart would break.

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It was only the general reaction, but the sight of her tears unnerved me.

"Don't cry, girl; don't!" I whispered, taking her hand in mine. She made no effort to repulse me. "I am sorry. The rascal was a gallant beggar, and I for one shouldn't have been sorry to see him get away. There, there! You're the bravest, tenderest girl in all this world; and when I told him I loved you, God knows I meant it! It is one of those inexplicable things. You say I have known you only eight hours? I have known you always, only I had not met you. What are eight hours? What is convention, formality? We two have lived a lifetime in these eight hours. Can't you see that we have?"

"To shoot a human being!" she sobbed. Her head fell against my shoulder. I do not believe she was conscious of the fact. And I did not care a hang for the conductor.

I patted her hand encouragingly. "It had to be done. He was in a desperate predicament, and he would have shot Haggerty had the detective been careless in his turn; and he wouldn't have aimed to maim, either."

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"What a horrible night! It will haunt me as long as I live!"

I said nothing; and we did not speak again till the first of the Blankshire lights flashed by us. By this time her sobs had ceased.

"I know *I* haven't done anything especially gallant to-night; no fighting, no rescuing, and all that. They just moved *me* around like a piece of stage scenery."

A smile flashed and was gone. It was a hopeful sign.

"But the results are the same. You have admitted to me that you are neither engaged nor married. Won't you take me on — on approval?"

"Mr. Comstalk, it all seems so like a horrid dream. You *are* a brave man, and what is better, a sensible one, for you submitted to the inevitable with the best possible grace. But you talk of love as readily as a hero in a popular novel."

"I never go back," said I. "It seems incredible, doesn't it, that I should declare myself in this fashion? Listen. For my part, I believe that all this was written,— my Tom-foolery in Mouquin's,





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my imposture and yours, the two identical cards,—
the adventure from beginning to end.”

Silence.

“Suppose I should say,” the girl began, looking out of the window, “that in the restaurant you aroused my curiosity, that in the cellars my admiration was stirred, that the frank manner in which you expressed your regard for me to — to the burglar — awakened —”

“What?” I cried eagerly.

“Nothing. It was merely a supposition.”

“Hang it; I *do* love you!”

“Are you still the Capuchin, or simply Mr. Comstalk?”

“I have laid aside all masks, even that which hides the heart.”

She turned and looked me steadily in the eyes.

“Well?” said I.

“If I took you on — on approval, what in the world should I do with you in case you should not
suit my needs?”

“You could return me,” said I laughing.

But she didn’t.

THE PRINCESS ELOPES*

I

It is rather difficult in these days for a man who takes such scant interest in foreign affairs — trust a whilom diplomat for that! — to follow the continual geographical disturbances of European surfaces. Thus, I can not distinctly recall the exact location of the Grand Duchy of Barscheit or of the neighboring principality of Doppelkinn. It meets my needs and purposes, however, to say that Berlin and Vienna were easily accessible, and that a three hours' journey would bring you under the shadow of the Carpathian Range, where, in my diplomatic days, I used often to hunt the "bear that walks like a man."

Barscheit was known among her sister states as "the meddler," the "maker of trouble," and the duke as "Old Grumpy" — *Brummbär*. To use a familiar Yankee expression, Barscheit had a finger in every pie. Whenever there was a political broth

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making, whether in Italy, Germany or Austria, Barscheit would snatch up a ladle and start in. She took care of her own affairs so easily that she had plenty of time to concern herself with the affairs of her neighbors. This is not to advance the opinion that Barscheit was wholly modern; far from it. The fault of Barscheit may be traced back to a certain historical pillar of salt, easily recalled by all those who attended Sunday-school. "Rubbering" is a vulgar phrase, and I disdain to use it.

When a woman looks around it is invariably a portent of trouble; the man forgets his important engagement, and runs amuck, knocking over people, principles and principalities. If Aspasia had not observed Pericles that memorable day; if there had not been an oblique slant to Calypso's eyes as Ulysses passed her way; if the eager Delilah had not offered favorable comment on Samson's ringlets; in fact, if all the women in history and romance had gone about their affairs as they should have done, what uninteresting reading history would be to-day!

Now, this is a story of a woman who looked around, and of a man who did not keep his ap-

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pointment on time; out of a grain of sand, a mountain. Of course there might have been other causes, but with these I'm not familiar.

This Duchy of Barscheit is worth looking into. Imagine a country with telegraph and telephone and medieval customs, a country with electric lights, railways, surface-cars, hotel elevators and ancient laws! Something of the customs of the duchy must be told in the passing, though, for my part, I am vigorously against explanatory passages in stories of action. Barscheit bristled with militarism; the little man always imitates the big one, but lacks the big man's excuses. Militarism entered into and overshadowed the civic laws.

There were three things you might do without offense; you might bathe, eat and sleep, only you must not sleep out loud. The citizen of Barscheit was hemmed in by a set of laws which had their birth in the dark dungeons of the Inquisition. They congealed the blood of a man born and bred in a commercial country. If you broke a law, you were relentlessly punished; there was no mercy. In America we make laws and then hide them in dull-looking volumes which the public have neither the time nor the inclination to read. In this

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duchy of mine it was different; you ran into a law on every corner, in every park, in every public building: little oblong signs, enameled, which told you that you could *not* do something or other — “Forbidden!” The beauty of German laws is that when you learn all the things that you can not do, you begin to find out that the things you can do are not worth a hang in the doing.

As soon as a person learned to read he or she began life by reading these laws. If you could not read, so much the worse for you; you had to pay a guide who charged you almost as much as the full cost of the fine.

The opposition political party in the United States is always howling militarism, without the slightest idea of what militarism really is. One side, please, in Barscheit, when an officer comes along, or take the consequences. If you carelessly bumped into him, you were knocked down. If you objected, you were arrested. If you struck back, ten to one you received a beating with the flat of a saber. And never, never mistake the soldiery for the police; that is to say, never ask an officer to direct you to any place. This is regarded in the light of an insult. The cub-lieu-

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tenants do more to keep a passable sidewalk — for the passage of said cub-lieutenants — than all the magistrates put together. How they used to swagger up and down the Königsstrasse, around the Platz, in and out of the restaurants! I remember doing some side-stepping myself, and I was a diplomat, supposed to be immune from the rank discourtesies of the military. But that was early in my career.

In a year not so remote as not to be readily recalled, the United States packed me off to Barscheit because I had an uncle who was a senator. Some papers were given me, the permission to hang out a shingle reading “American Consul,” and the promise of my board and keep. My amusements were to be paid out of my own pocket. Straightway I purchased three horses, found a capable Japanese valet, and selected a cozy house near the barracks, which stood west of the Volksgarten, on a pretty lake. A beautiful road ran around this body of water, and it wasn’t long ere the officers began to pass comments on the riding of “that wild American.” As I detest what is known as park-riding, you may very well believe that I circled the lake at a clip which must have opened the

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eyes of the easy-going officers. I grew quite chummy with a few of them; and I may speak of occasions when I did not step off the sidewalk as they came along. A man does more toward gaining the affection of foreigners by giving a good dinner now and then than by international law. I gained considerable fame by my little dinners at Müller's Rathskeller, under the Continental Hotel.

Six months passed, during which I rode, read, drove and dined, the actual labors of the consulate being cared for by a German clerk who knew more about the business than I did.

By this you will observe that diplomacy has degenerated into the gentle art of exciting jaded palates and of scribbling one's name across passports; I know of no better definition. I forget what the largess of my office was.

Presently there were terrible doings. The old reigning grand duke desired peace of mind; and moving determinedly toward this end, he declared in public that his niece, the young and tender Princess Hildegarde, should wed the Prince of Doppelkinn, whose vineyards gave him a fine income. This was finality; the avuncular guardian had waited long enough for his wilful ward to

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make up her mind as to the selection of a suitable husband; now *he* determined to take a hand in the matter. And you shall see how well he managed it.

It is scarcely necessary for me to state that her Highness had her own ideas of what a husband should be like, gathered, no doubt, from execrable translations from "Ouida" and the gentle Miss Braddon. A girl of twenty usually has a formidable regard for romance, and the princess was fully up to the manner of her kind. If she could not marry romantically, she refused to marry at all.

I can readily appreciate her uncle's perturbation. I do not know how many princelings she thrust into utter darkness. She would *never* marry a man who wore glasses; this one was too tall, that one too short; and when one happened along who was without visible earmarks or signs of being shop-worn her refusal was based upon just — "Because!" — a weapon as invincible as the fabled spear of Parsifal. She had spurned the addresses of Prince Mischler, laughed at those of the Count of — - — (the short dash indicates the presence of a hyphen) and General Muerrisch, of

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the emperor's body-guard, who was, I'm sure, good enough — in his own opinion — for any woman. Every train brought to the capital some suitor with a consonated, hyphenated name and a pedigree as long as a bore's idea of a funny story. But the princess did not care for pedigrees that were squint-eyed or bow-legged. One and all of them she cast aside as unworthy her consideration. Then, like the ancient worm, the duke turned. She should marry Doppelkinn, who, having no wife to do the honors in his castle, was wholly agreeable.

The Prince of Doppelkinn reigned over the neighboring principality. If you stood in the middle of it and were a baseball player, you could throw a stone across the frontier in any direction. But the vineyards were among the finest in Europe. The prince was a widower, and among his own people was affectionately styled "*der Rotnäsiger*," which, I believe, designates an illuminated proboscis. When he wasn't fishing for rainbow trout he was sleeping in his cellars. He was often missing at the monthly reviews, but nobody ever worried; they knew where to find him. And besides, he might just as well sleep in his cellars as in his car-

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riage, for he never rode a horse if he could get out of doing so. He was really good-natured and easy-going, so long as no one crossed him severely; and you could tell him a joke once and depend upon his understanding it immediately, which is more than I can say for the duke.

Years and years ago the prince had had a son; but at the tender age of three the boy had run away from the castle confines, and no one ever heard of him again. The enemies of the prince whispered among themselves that the boy had run away to escape compulsory military service, but the boy's age precluded this accusation. The prince advertised, after the fashion of those times, sent out detectives and notified his various brothers; but his trouble went for nothing. Not the slightest trace of the boy could be found. So he was mourned for a season, regretted and then forgotten; the prince adopted the grape-arbor.

I saw the prince once. I do not blame the Princess Hildegarde for her rebellion. The prince was not only old; he was fat and ugly, with little, elephant-like eyes that were always vein-shot, restless and full of mischief. He *might* have made a good father, but I have nothing to prove

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this. Those bottles of sparkling Moselle which he failed to dispose of to the American trade he gave to his brother in Barscheit or drank himself. He was sixty-eight years old.

A nephew, three times removed, was waiting for the day when he should wobble around in the prince's shoes. He was a lieutenant in the duke's body-guard, a quick-tempered, heady chap. Well, he never wobbled around in his uncle's shoes, for he never got the chance.

I hadn't been in Barscheit a week before I heard a great deal about the princess. She was a famous horsewoman. This made me extremely anxious to meet her. Yet for nearly six months I never even got so much as a glimpse of her. Half of the six months she was traveling through Austria, and the other half she kept out of my way,—not intentionally; she knew nothing of my existence; simply, fate moved us about blindly. At court, she was invariably indisposed, and at the first court ball she retired before I arrived. I got up at all times, galloped over all roads, but never did I see her. She rode alone, too, part of the time.

The one picture of her which I was lucky enough to see had been taken when she was six,

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and meant nothing to me in the way of identification. For all I knew I might have passed her on the road. She became to me the Princess in the Invisible Cloak, passing me often and doubtless deriding my efforts to discern her. My curiosity became alarming. I couldn't sleep for the thought of her. Finally we met, but the meeting was a great surprise to us both. This meeting happened during the great hubbub of which I have just written; and at the same time I met another who had great weight in my future affairs.

The princess and I became rather well acquainted. I was not a gentleman, according to her code, but, in the historic words of the drug clerk, I was something just as good. She honored me with a frank, disinterested friendship, which still exists. I have yet among my fading souvenirs of diplomatic service half a dozen notes commanding me to get up at dawn and ride around the lake, something like sixteen miles. She was almost as reckless a rider as myself. She was truly a famous rider, and a woman who sits well on a horse can never be aught but graceful. She was, in fact, youthful and charming, with the most magnificent black eyes I ever beheld in a Teutonic

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head; witty, besides, and a songstress of no ordinary talent. If I had been in love with her — which I solemnly vow I was not! — I should have called her beautiful and exhausted my store of complimentary adjectives.

The basic cause of all this turmoil, about which I am to spin my narrative, lay in her education. I hold that a German princess should never be educated save as a German. By this I mean to convey that her education should not go beyond German literature, German history, German veneration of laws, German manners and German passivity and docility. The Princess Hildegarde had been educated in England and France, which simplifies everything, or, I should say, to be exact, complicates everything.

She possessed a healthy contempt for that what-d'-ye-call-it that hedges in a king. Having mingled with English-speaking people, she returned to her native land, her brain filled with the importance of feminine liberty of thought and action. Hence, she became the bramble that prodded the grand duke whichever way he turned. His days were filled with horrors, his nights with mares which did not have box-stalls in his stables.

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Never could he anticipate her in anything. On that day he placed guards around the palace she wrote verses or read modern fiction; the moment he relaxed his vigilance she was away on some heart-rending escapade. Didn't she scandalize the nobility by dressing up as a hussar and riding her famous black Mecklenburg cross-country? Hadn't she flirted outrageously with the French attaché and deliberately turned her back on the Russian minister, at the very moment, too, when negotiations were going on between Russia and Barscheit relative to a small piece of land in the Balkans? And, most terrible of all to relate, hadn't she ridden a shining bicycle up the Königsstrasse, in broad daylight, and in bifurcated skirts, besides? I shall never forget the indignation of the press at the time of this last escapade, the stroke of apoplexy which threatened the duke, and the room with the barred window which the princess occupied one whole week.

They burned the offensive bicycle in the courtyard of the palace, ceremoniously, too, and the princess had witnessed this solemn *auto da fé* from her barred window. It is no strain upon the imagination to conjure up the picture of her fine

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rage, her threatening hands, her compressed lips, her tearless, flashing eyes, as she saw her beautiful new wheel writhe and twist on the blazing fagots. But what the deuce was a poor duke to do with a niece like this?

For a time I feared that the United States and the Grand Duchy of Barscheit would sever diplomatic relations. The bicycle was, unfortunately, of American make, and the manufacturers wrote to me personally that they considered themselves grossly insulted over the action of the duke. Diplomatic notes were exchanged, and I finally prevailed upon the duke to state that he held the wheel harmless and that his anger had been directed solely against his niece. This letter was duly forwarded to the manufacturers, who, after the manner of their kind, carefully altered the phrasing and used it in their magazine advertisements. They were so far appeased that they offered me my selection from the private stock. Happily the duke never read anything but the *Fliegende Blätter* and *Jugend*, and thus war was averted.

Later an automobile agent visited the town — at the secret bidding of her Highness — but he was so unceremoniously hustled over the frontier that

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his teeth must have rattled like a dancer's castanets. It was a great country for expeditiousness, as you will find, if you do me the honor to follow me to the end.

So the grand duke swore that his niece should wed Doppelkinn, and the princess vowed that she would not. The man who had charge of my horses said that one of the palace maids had recounted to him a dialogue which had taken place between the duke and his niece. As I was anxious to be off on the road I was compelled to listen to his gossip.

THE GRAND DUKE — In two months' time you shall wed the Prince of Doppelkinn.

THE PRINCESS — What! that old red-nose? Never! I shall marry only where I love.

THE GRAND DUKE — Only where you love! (*Sneers.*) One would think, to hear you talk, that you were capable of loving something.

THE PRINCESS — You have yet to learn. I warn you not to force me. I promise to do something scandalous. I will marry one of the people — a man.

THE GRAND DUKE — Bah! (*Swears softly on his way down to the stables.*)

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But the princess had in her mind a plan which, had it gone through safely, would have added many grey hairs to the duke's scanty collection. It was a mighty ingenious plan, too, for a woman to figure out.

In his attitude toward the girl the duke stood alone. Behind his back his ministers wore out their shoes in waiting on the caprices of the girl, while the grand duchess, half-blind and half-deaf, openly worshiped her wilful but wholly adorable niece, and abetted her in all her escapades. So far as the populace was concerned, she was the daughter of the favorite son, dead these eighteen years, and that was enough for them. Whatever she did was right and proper. But the hard-headed duke had the power to say what should be what, and he willed it that the Princess Hildegarde should marry his old comrade in arms, the Prince of Doppelkinn.

II

As I have already remarked, I used frequently to take long rides into the country, and sometimes I did not return till the following day. My clerk was always on duty, and the work never appeared to make him round-shouldered.

I had ridden horses for years, and to throw a leg over a good mount was to me one of the greatest pleasures in the world. I delighted in stopping at the old feudal inns, of studying the stolid German peasant, of drinking from steins uncracked these hundred years, of inspecting ancient armor and gathering trifling romances attached thereto. And often I have had the courage to stop at some quaint, crumbling *Schloss* or castle and ask for a night's lodging for myself and horse. Seldom, if ever, did I meet with a refusal.

I possessed the whimsical habit of picking out strange roads and riding on till night swooped down from the snow-capped mountains. I had a bit of poetry in my system that had never been

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completely worked out, and I was always imagining that at the very next *Schloss* or inn I was to hit upon some delectable adventure. I was only twenty-eight, and inordinately fond of my Dumas.

I rode in grey whipcord breeches, tan boots, a blue serge coat, white stock, and never a hat or cap till the snow blew. I used to laugh when the peasants asked leave to lend me a cap or to run back and find the one I had presumably lost.

One night the delectable adventure for which I was always seeking came my way, and I was wholly unprepared for it.

I had taken the south highway: that which seeks the valley beyond the lake. The moon-film lay mistily upon everything: on the far-off lake, on the great upheavals of stone and glacier above me, on the long white road that stretched out before me, ribbon-wise. High up the snow on the mountains resembled huge opals set in amethyst. I was easily twenty-five miles from the city; that is to say, I had been in the saddle some six hours. Nobody but a king's messenger will ride a horse more than five miles an hour. I cast about for a place to spend the night. There was no tavern in sight, and the hovels I had passed during the last

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hour offered no shelter for my horse. Suddenly, around a bend in the road, I saw the haven I was seeking. It was a rambling, tottering old castle, standing in the center of a cluster of firs; and the tiles of the roofs and the ivy of the towers were shining silver with the heavy fall of dew.

Lady Chloe sniffed her kind, whinnied, and broke into a trot. She knew sooner than I that there was life beyond the turn. We rode up to the gate, and I dismounted and stretched myself. I tried the gate. The lock hung loose, like a paralytic hand. Evidently those inside had nothing to fear from those outside. I grasped an iron bar and pushed in the gate, Chloe following knowingly at my heels. I could feel the crumbling rust on my gloves. Chloe whinnied again, and there came an answering whinny from somewhere in the rear of the castle. Somebody must be inside, I reasoned.

There were lights in the left wing, but this part of the castle was surrounded by an empty moat, damp and weedy. This was not to be entered save by a ladder. There was a great central door, however, which had a modern appearance. The approach was a broad graveled walk. I tied Lady Chloe to a tree, knotted the bridle-reins above her

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neck to prevent her from putting her restless feet into them, and proceeded toward the door.

Of all the nights this was the one on which my usually lively imagination reposed. I was hungry and tired, and I dare say my little mare was. I wasn't looking for an adventure; I didn't want any adventure; I wanted nothing in the world but a meal and a bed. But for the chill of the night air — the breath of the mountain is cold at night — I should have been perfectly willing to sleep in the open. Down drawbridge, up portcullis!

I boldly climbed the steps and groped around for the knocker. It was broken and useless, like the lock on the gate. And never a bell could I find. I swore softly and became impatient. People in Barscheit did not usually live in this slovenly fashion. What sort of place was this?

Suddenly I grew erect, every fiber in my body tense and expectant.

A voice, lifted in song! A great penetrating yet silkily mellow voice; a soprano; heavenly, not to say ghostly, coming as it did from the heart of this gloomy ruin of stone and iron. The jewel song from *Faust*, too! How the voice rose, fell, soared again with intoxicating waves of sound!

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What permeating sweetness! I stood there, a solitary listener, as far as I knew, bewildered, my heart beating hard and fast. I forgot my hunger.

Had I stumbled upon one of my dreams at last? Had Romance suddenly relented, as a coquette sometimes relents? For a space I knew not what to do. Then, with a shrug — I have never been accused of lacking courage — I tried once more, by the aid of a match, to locate a bell. There was absolutely nothing; and the beating of my riding-crop on the panels of that huge door would have been as noisy as a feather. I grasped the knob and turned it impatiently. Behold! the door opened without sound, and I stepped into the hallway, which was velvet black.

The wonderful voice went on. I paused, with hands outstretched. Supposing I bumped into something! I took a step forward, another and another; I swung my crop in a half-circle; all was vacancy. I took another step, this time in the direction of the voice — and started back with a smothered curse. Bang-ang! I had run into a suit of old armor, the shield of which had clattered to the stone floor. As I have observed, I am not a

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coward, but I had all I could do to keep my legs — which were stirrup-weary, anyhow — from knocking under me!

Silence!

The song died. All over that great rambling structure not even the reassuring chirp of a cricket! I stood perfectly still. What the deuce should I do? Turn back? As I formed this question in my mind a draft of wind slammed the door shut. I was in for it, sure enough; I was positive that I could never find that door again. There was nothing to do but wait, and wait with straining ears. Here were mysterious inhabitants — they might be revolutionists, conspirators, counterfeits.

Heaven knows how long I waited.

Soon I heard a laugh, light, infectious, fearless! Then I heard a voice, soft and pleading.

“Don’t go; in mercy’s name, don’t go, Gretchen! You may be killed!”

English! I had actually heard a voice speak my native tongue.

“Nonsense, Betty! I am not afraid of any ghost that ever walked, rode or floated.”

“Ghost? It may be a burglar!”

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“Or Steinbock! We shall find nothing.”

Indeed!

“Nothing but a rat, bungling about in the armor.” The laughter came again. “You are not *afraid*, Betty?”

“Only cautious. But how can you laugh? A rat?” cried a voice rather anxiously. “Why, they are as big as dogs!”

“But arrant cowards.”

So! one of these voices spoke English as its birthright; the other spoke with an accent, that is to say, by adoption. Into what had I fallen? Whither had my hunger brought me? I was soon to learn.

There came a faint thread of light on one side of the hall, such as may be likened to that which filters under a door-sill. Presently this was followed by the sound of jangling brass rings. A heavy velvet portière — which I, being in darkness, had not discovered — slipped back. My glance, rather blinded, was first directed toward the flame of the candle. Then I lowered it — and surrendered for ever and for ever!

I beheld two faces in profile, as it were, one side in darkness, the other tinted and glowing like an-

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cient ivory. I honestly confess to you that in all my wanderings — and they have been frequent and many — I never saw such an enchanting picture or two more exquisite faces. One peered forth with hesitant bravery; the other — she who held the candle — with cold, tranquil inquiry.

All my fears, such as they were, left me instantly. Besides, I was not without a certain amount of gallantry and humor. I stepped squarely into the light and bowed.

“Ladies, I am indeed not a ghost, but I promise you that I shall be if I am not offered something to eat at once!”

Tableau!

“What are you doing here?” asked she with the candle, her midnight eyes drawing down her brows into a frown of displeasure.

I bowed. “To begin with, I find a gate unlocked, and being curious, I open it; then I find a door unlatched, and I enter. Under these unusual circumstances I am forced to ask the same question of you: what are you doing here in this ruined castle? If it isn’t ruined, it is deserted, which amounts to the same thing.” This *was* impertinent, especially on the part of a self-invited guest.

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"That is my affair, sir. I have a right here, now and at all times." Her voice was cold and authoritative. "There is an inn six miles farther down the road; this is a private residence. Certainly you can not remain here over night."

"Six miles?" I echoed dismally. "Madam, if I have seemed impertinent, pardon me. I have been in the saddle six hours. I have ridden nearly thirty miles since noon. I am dead with fatigue. At least give me time to rest a bit before taking up the way again, I admit that the manner of my entrance was informal; but how was I to know? There was not even a knocker on the door by which to make known my presence to you." The truth is, I did not want to go at once. No one likes to stumble into an adventure — enchanting as this promised to be — and immediately pop out of it. An idea came to me, serviceable rather than brilliant. "I am an American. My German is poor. I speak no French. I have lost my way, it would seem; I am hungry and tired. To ride six miles farther now is a physical impossibility; and I am very fond of my horse."

"He says he is hungry, Gretchen," said the English girl, dropping easily into the French

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language as a vehicle of speech. (I was a wretch, I know, but I simply could not help telling that lie; I didn't want to go; and they *might* be conspirators.) "Besides," went on the girl, "he looks like a gentleman."

"We can not always tell a gentleman in the candle-light," replied Gretchen, eying me critically and shrewdly and suspiciously.

As for me, I gazed from one to the other, inquiringly, after the manner of one who hears a tongue not understandable.

"He's rather nice," was the English girl's comment; "and his eyes strike me as being too steady to be dishonest."

I had the decency to burn in the ears. I had taken the step, so now I could not draw back. I sincerely hoped that they would not exchange any embarrassing confidences. When alone women converse upon many peculiar topics; and conversing in a tongue which they supposed to be unknown to me, these two were virtually alone.

"But, my dear child," the other returned argumentatively, "we can not offer hospitality to a strange man this night of all nights. Think of what is to be accomplished."

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(So something was to be accomplished? I was right, then, in deceiving them. To accomplish something on a night like this, far from habitation, had all the air of a conspiracy.)

"Feed him and his horse, and I'll undertake to get rid of him before that detestable Steinbock comes. Besides, he might prove a valuable witness in drawing up the papers."

(Papers?)

"I never thought of that. It will not do to trust Steinbock wholly." Gretchen turned her searching eyes once more upon me. I confess that I had some difficulty in steadyng my own. There are some persons to whom one can not lie successfully; one of them stood before me. But I rather fancy I passed through the ordeal with at least half a victory. "Will you go your way after an hour's rest?" she asked, speaking in the familiar tongue.

"I promise." It was easy to make this promise. I wasn't a diplomat for nothing. I knew how to hang on, to dodge under, to go about.

"Follow me," Gretchen commanded briefly.

(Who was she? What was going on?)

We passed through the gloomy salon. A

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damp, musty odor struck my sense of smell. I was positive that the castle was uninhabited, save for this night. Three candles burned on the mantel, giving to the gloom a mysterious, palpitating effect. The room beyond was the dining-room, richly paneled in wine-colored mahogany. This was better; it was cheerful. A log crackled in the fireplace. There were plenty of candles. There was a piano, too. This belonged to the castle; a heavy tarpaulin covering lay heaped at one side. There was a mahogany sideboard that would have sent a collector of antiques into raptures, and a table upon which lay the remains of a fine supper. My mouth watered. I counted over the good things: roast pheasant, pink ham, a sea-food salad, asparagus, white bread and unsalted butter, an alcohol-burner over which hung a tea-pot, and besides all this there was a pint of La Rose which was but half-emptied. Have you ever been in the saddle half a day? If you have, you will readily appreciate the appetite that was warring with my curiosity.

"Eat," bade she who was called Gretchen, shortly.

"And my horse?"

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“Where is it?”

“Tied to a tree by the gate.”

She struck a Chinese gong. From the kitchen appeared an elderly servitor who looked to me more fitted to handle a saber than a carving-knife; at least, the scar on his cheek impressed me with this idea. (I found out later that he was an old soldier, who lived alone in the castle as caretaker.)

“Take this gentleman’s horse to the stables and feed him,” said Gretchen. “You will find the animal by the gate.”

With a questioning glance at me the old fellow bowed and made off.

I sat down, and the two women brought the various plates and placed them within reach. Their beautiful hands flashed before my eyes and now and then a sleeve brushed my shoulder.

“Thank you,” I murmured. “I will eat first, and then make my apologies.”

This remark caught the fancy of Gretchen. She laughed. It was the same laughter I had heard while standing in the great hall.

“Will you drink tea, or would you prefer to finish this Bordeaux?” she asked pleasantly.

“The wine, if you please; otherwise the effect

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of the meal and the long hours in the wind will produce sleepiness. And it would be frightfully discourteous on my part to fall asleep in my chair. I am very hard to awake."

The English girl poured out the wine and passed the goblet to me. I touched my lips to the glass, and bent my head politely. Then I resolutely proceeded to attack the pheasant and ham. I must prove to these women that at least I was honest in regard to my hunger. I succeeded in causing a formidable portion of the food to disappear.

And then I noticed that neither of the young women seated herself while I ate. I understood. There was no hostility in this action; nothing but formality. They declined to sit in the presence of an unwelcome stranger, thus denying his equality from a social point of view. I readily accepted this decision on their part. They didn't know who I was. They stood together by the fireplace and carried on a conversation in low tones.

How shall I describe them? The elder of the two, the one who seemed to possess all the authority, could not have been more than twenty. Her figure was rather matured, yet it was delicate.

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Her hair was tawny, her skin olive in shade and richly tinted at the cheek-bones. Her eyes, half framed by thick, black-arching brows, reminded me of woodland pools in the dusk of evening,—depths unknown, cool, refreshing in repose. The chin was resolute, the mouth was large but shapely and brilliant, the nose possessed the delicate nostrils characteristic of all sensitive beings—that is to say, thoroughbreds; altogether a confusing, bewildering beauty. At one moment I believed her to be Latin, at the next I was positive that she was Teutonic. I could not discover a single weak point, unless impulsiveness shall be called weakness; this sign of impulsiveness was visible in the lips.

The other—well, I couldn't help it. It was *Kismet*, fate, the turn in the road, what you will. I fell heels over head in love with her at once. She was charming, exquisite, one of those delicate creatures who always appear in enchantments; a Bouguereau child grown into womanhood, made to fit the protecting frame of a man's arms. Love steals into the heart when we least expect him; and before we are aware, the sly lit-

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tle god has unpacked his trunk and taken possession!

Eyes she had as blue as the *Ægean* Sea on windy days, blue as the cloud-winnowed sky of a winter's twilight, blue as sapphires — Irish eyes! Her hair was as dark and silken as a plume from the wings of night. (Did I not say that I had some poetry in my system?) The shape of her mouth — Never mind; I can recall only the mad desire to kiss it. A graceful figure, a proud head, a slender hand, a foot so small that I wondered if it really poised, balanced or supported her young body. Tender she must be, and loving, enclitical rather than erect like her authoritative companion. She was adorable.

All this inventory of feminine charms was taken by furtive glances, sometimes caught — or were they taking an inventory of myself? Presently my appetite became singularly submissive. Hunger often is satisfied by the feeding of the eyes. I dropped my napkin on the table and pushed back my chair. My hostesses ceased conversing.

"Ladies," said I courteously, "I offer you my sincere apologies for this innocent intrusion." I

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looked at my watch. "I believe that you gave me an hour's respite. So, then, I have thirty minutes to my account."

The women gazed at each other. One laughed, and the other smiled; it was the English girl who laughed this time. I liked the sound of it better than any I had yet heard.

(Pardon another parenthesis. I hope you haven't begun to think that *I* am the hero of this comedy. Let it be furthest from your thoughts. I am only a passive bystander.)

"I sincerely trust that your hunger is appeased," said the one who had smiled.

"It is, thank you." I absently fumbled in my coat pockets, then guiltily dropped my hands. What a terrible thing habit is!

"You may smoke," said the Bouguereau child who was grown into womanhood. Wasn't that fine of her? And wasn't it rather observant, too? I learned later that she had a brother who was fond of tobacco. To her eyes my movement was a familiar one.

"With your kind permisison," said I gratefully. I hadn't had a smoke in four hours.

I owned a single good cigar, the last of my

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importation. I lighted it and blew forth a snowy billow of heavenly aroma. I know something about human nature, even the feminine side of it. A presentable young man with a roll of aromatic tobacco seldom fails to win the confidence of those about him. With that cloud of smoke the raw edge of formality smoothed down.

"Had you any particular destination?" asked Gretchen.

"None at all. The road took my fancy, and I simply followed it."

"Ah! that is one of the pleasures of riding—to go wherever the inclination bids. I ride."

We were getting on famously.

"Do you take long journeys?" I inquired.

"Often. It is the most exhilarating of sports," said the Enchantment. "The scenery changes; there are so many things that charm and engage your interest: the mountains, the waterways, the old ruins. Have you ever whistled to the horses afield and watched them come galloping down to the wall? It is fine. In England—" But her mouth closed suddenly. She was talking to a stranger.

I love enthusiasm in a woman. It colors her

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cheeks and makes her eyes sparkle. I grew a bit bolder.

"I heard a wonderful voice as I approached the castle," said I.

Gretchen shrugged.

"I haven't heard its equal outside Berlin or Paris," I went on.

"Paris?" said Gretchen, laying a neat little trap for me into which my conceit was soon to tumble me. "Paris is a marvelous city."

"There is no city to equal it. Inasmuch as we three shall never meet again, will you not do me the honor to repeat that jewel song from *Faust*?" My audacity did not impress her in the least.

"You can scarcely expect me to give a supper to a stranger and then sing for him, besides," said Gretchen, a chill again stealing into her tones. "These Americans!" she observed to her companion in French.

I laid aside my cigar, approached the piano, and sat down. I struck a few chords and found the instrument to be in remarkably good order. I played a Chopin *Polonaise*, I tinkled Grieg's *Papillon*, then I ceased.

"That is to pay for my supper," I explained.

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Next I played *Le Courier*, and when I had finished that I turned again, rising.

"That is to pay for my horse's supper," I said.

Gretchen's good humor returned.

"Whoever you are, sir," her tone no longer repellent, "you are amusing. Pray, tell us whom we have the honor to entertain?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea who my hostess is,"—evasively.

"It is quite out of the question. You are the intruder."

"Call me Mr. Intruder, then," said I.

It was, you will agree, a novel adventure. I was beginning to enjoy it hugely.

"Who do you suppose this fellow is?" Gretchen asked.

"He says he is an American, and I believe he is. What Americans are in Barscheit?"

"I know of none at all. What shall we do to get rid of him?"

All this was carried on with unstudied rudeness. They were women of high and noble quality; and as I was an interloper, I could take no exception to a conversation in a language I had stated I did not

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understand. If they were rude, I had acted in a manner unbecoming a gentleman. Still, I was somewhat on the defensive. I took out my watch. My hour was up.

"I regret that I must be off," I said ruefully. "It is much pleasanter here than on the road."

"I can not ask you to remain here. You will find the inn a very comfortable place for the night," was Gretchen's suggestion.

"Before I go, may I ask in what manner I might serve as a witness?" Ere the words had fully crossed my lips I recognized that my smartness had caused me to commit an unpardonable blunder for a man who wished to show up well in an adventure of this sort. (But fate had a hand in it, as presently you shall see.)

Gretchen laughed, but the sound was harsh and metallic. She turned to her companion, who was staring at me with startled eyes.

"What did I tell you? You can not tell a gentleman in the candle-light." To me she said: "I thought as much. You have heard *Faust* in Paris, but you know nothing of the French language. You claimed to be a gentleman, yet you have permitted us to converse in French."

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"Was it polite of you to use it?" I asked. "All this," with a wave of the hand, "appears mysterious. This is not a residence one would expect to find inhabited—and by two charming women!" I bowed. "Your presence here is even less satisfactorily explained than mine. If I denied the knowledge of French it was because I wasn't sure of my surroundings. It was done in self-defense rather than in the desire to play a trick. And in this language you speak of witnesses, of papers, of the coming of a man you do not trust. It looks very much like a conspiracy." I gathered up my gloves and riding-crop. I believed that I had extricated myself rather well.

"This is my castle," said Gretchen, gently shaking off the warning hand of her companion. "If I desire to occupy it for a night, who shall gainsay me? If I leave the latches down, that is due to the fact that I have no one to fear. Now, sir, you have eaten the bread of my table, and I demand to know who you are. If you do not tell me at once, I shall be forced to confine you here till I am ready to leave."

"Confine me!"—nonplussed. This was more than I had reckoned on.

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"Yes." She reached out to strike the gong. (I can not be blamed for surrendering so tamely. I didn't know that the old servitor was the only man around.)

"I am the American consul at Barscheit."

The two women drew together instinctively, as if one desired to protect the other from some unknown calamity. What the deuce was it all about? All at once Gretchen thrust aside her friend and approached. The table was between us, and she rested her hands upon it. Our glances met and clashed.

"Did the duke send you here?" she demanded repellently.

"The duke?" I was getting deeper than ever.
"The duke?"

"Yes. I am the Princess Hildegarde."

III

The Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit! My gloves and riding-crop slipped from my nerveless fingers to the floor. A numbing, wilting sensation wrinkled my spine. The Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit! She stood opposite me, the woman—ought I not to say girl?—for whom I had been seeking, after a fashion, all these months! The beautiful madcap who took the duchy by the ears, every now and then, and tweaked them! The princess herself, here in this lonely old castle into which I had so carelessly stumbled! Romance, enchantment! Oddly enough, the picture of her riding a bicycle flashed through my brain, and this was followed by another, equally engaging, of the hussar who rode cross-country, to the horror of the conservative element at court.

“The Princess Hildegarde!” I murmured stupidly.

“Yes. I have asked you a question, sir. Or

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shall I put the question in French?"—ironically.
"Was it the duke who sent you here?"

There was a look in her superb eyes which told me that it would have been to her infinite pleasure to run a sword through my black and villainous heart. Presently I recovered. With forced calm I stooped and collected my gloves and crop.

"Your Highness, what the deuce has the duke to do with my affairs, or I with his? As an American, you would scarcely expect me to meddle with your private affairs. You are the last person in the world I thought to meet this night. I represent the United States in this country, and though I am inordinately young, I have acquired the habit of attending to my own affairs."

From the angry face in front of me I turned to the dismayed face beyond. There must have been a question in my glance. The young woman drew herself up proudly.

"I am the Honorable Betty Moore."

(The princess' schoolmate in England!)

Her Highness stood biting the knuckle of a forefinger, undecided as to what path of action to enter, to reach a satisfactory end. My very rude-

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ness convinced her more than anything else that I spoke the truth.

"How, then, did you select this particular road?"—still entertaining some doubt.

"It is a highway, free to all. But I have already explained that," I answered quietly. I moved deliberately toward the door, but with a cat-like movement she sprang in front of me. "Well, your Highness?"

"Wait!" she commanded, extending an authoritative arm (lovely too!). "Since you are here, and since you know who I am, you must remain."

"Must?" I repeated, taken aback.

"Must! My presence here ought not to be known to any one. When you witness that which shall take place here to-night, you will understand." Her tone lost its evenness; it trembled and became a bit wild.

"In what manner may I be of service to your Highness?" I asked pleasantly, laying aside my gloves and crop again. "I can easily give you my word of honor as a gentleman not to report your presence here; but if I am forced to remain, I certainly demand—"

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"Desire," she corrected, the old fire in her eyes.

"Thank you. I desire, then, to know the full reason; for I can not be a party to anything which may reflect upon the consulate. For myself, I do not care." What hare-brained escapade was now in the air?

The princess walked over to the mantel and rested her arms upon it, staring wide-eyed into the fire. Several minutes passed. I waited patiently; but, to tell the truth, I was on fire with curiosity. At length my patience was rewarded.

"You have heard that I am to marry the Prince of Doppelkinn?" she began.

I nodded.

"Doubtless you have also heard of my determination not to marry him?" she went on.

Again I nodded.

"Well, I am not going to marry him."

I was seized with the desire to laugh, but dared not. What had all this to do with my detention in the castle?

"Betty," said the princess, turning imploringly to her companion (what a change!), "*you* tell him."

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"I?" The Honorable Betty drew back.

(Had they kidnapped old Doppelkinn? I wondered.)

"I can not tell him," cried her Highness miserably, "I simply can not. *You* must do it, Betty. It is now absolutely necessary that he should know everything; it is absolutely vital that he be present. Perhaps Heaven has sent him. Do you understand? Now, tell him!"

And, wonders to behold! she who but a few minutes gone had been a princess in everything, cold, seeing, tranquil, she fled from the room. (Decidedly this was growing interesting. What *had* they done?) Thus, the Honorable Betty Moore and his Excellency, the American consul at Barscheit, were left staring into each other's eyes fully a minute.

"You will, of course, pledge me your word of honor?" She who had recently been timid now became cool and even-pulsed.

"If in pledging it I am asked to do nothing to discredit my office. I am not an independent individual,"—smiling to put her more at ease. (I haven't the least doubt that I would have committed any sort of folly had she required it of me.)

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"You have my word, sir, that you will be asked to do nothing dishonorable. On the other hand, you will confer a great favor upon her Highness, who is in deep trouble and is seeking a way to escape it."

"Command me," said I promptly.

"Her Highness is being forced into marriage with a man who is old enough to be her grandfather. She holds him in horror, and will go to any length to make this marriage an impossibility. For my part, I have tried to convince her of the futility of resisting her royal uncle's will." (Sensible little Britisher!) "What she is about to do will be known only to four persons, one of whom is a downright rascal."

"A rascal?" slipped my lips, half-unconsciously. "I trust that I haven't given you that impression," I added eagerly. (A rascal? The plot was thickening to formidable opaqueness.)

"No, no!" she cried hastily, with a flash of summer on her lips. (What is more charming than an English woman with a clear sense of the humorous?) "You haven't given me that impression at all."

"Thank you." My vanity expanded under

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the genial warmth of this knowledge. It was quite possible that she looked upon me favorably.

"To proceed. There is to be a kind of mock marriage here to-night, and you are to witness it." She watched me sharply.

I frowned.

"Patience! Not literally a mock marriage, but the filling out of a bogus certificate."

"I do not understand at all."

"You have heard of Hermann Steinbock, a cashiered officer?"

"Yes. I understand that he is the rascal to whom you refer."

"Well, this certificate is to be filled out completely. To outwit the duke, her Highness commits—"

"A forgery."

"It is a terrible thing to do, but she has gone too far to withdraw now. She is to become the wife of Hermann Steinbock. She wishes to show the certificate to the duke."

"But the banns have not been made public."

"That does not matter."

"But why detain me?" I was growing rest-

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less. It was all folly, and no good would come of it.

"It is necessary that a gentleman should be present. The caretaker is not a gentleman. I have said that Steinbock is a rascal. As I review the events, I begin to look upon your arrival as timely. Steinbock is not a reliable quantity."

"I begin to perceive."

"He is to receive one thousand crowns for his part in the ceremony; then he is to leave the country."

"But the priest's signature, the notary's seal, the iron-clad formalities which attend all these things!" I stammered.

"You will recollect that her Highness is a princess of the blood. Seldom is she refused anything in Barscheit." She went to a small secretary and produced a certificate, duly sealed and signed. There lacked nothing but Steinbock's name.

"But the rascal will boast about it! He may blackmail all of you. He may convince the public that he has really married her Highness."

"I think not. We have not moved in this blindly. Steinbock we know to have forged the

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name of the minister of finance. We hold this sword above his head. And if he should speak or boast of it, your word would hold greater weight than his. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand. But I believe that I am genuinely sorry to have blundered into this castle to-night."

"Oh, if you lack courage!"—carelessly.

I laughed. "I am not afraid of twenty Steinbocks."

Her laughter echoed mine. "Come, Mr.—by the way, I believe I do not know your name."

"Warrington—Arthur Warrington."

"That is a very good English name, and a gentleman possessing it will never leave two women in a predicament like this. You will understand that we dare not trust any one at court. Relative to her Highness, the duke succeeds in bribing all."

"But a rascal like Steinbock!"

"I know,"—a bit wearily.

"It is pardonable to say that I believe her Highness has been very foolish."

The girl made a gesture which conceded this fact. "It is too late to retreat, as I have told

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you. Steinbock is already on the way. We must trust him. But you?"

"After all, what does a consulate amount to?"

This seemed to be answer enough. She extended her hand in a royal fashion. I took it in one of mine, bent and kissed it respectfully. Apparently she had expected the old-fashioned handshake familiar to our common race, for I observed that she started as my lips came into contact with the back of her hand. As for me, when my lips touched the satin flesh I knew that it was all over.

"Your Highness!" she called.

The princess returned. She looked at me with a mixture of fierceness and defiance, humility and supplication. I had always supposed her to be a sort of hobbledehoy; instead, she was one of those rare creatures who possess all the varying moods of the sex. I could readily imagine all the young fellows falling violently in love with her; all the young fellows save one. I glanced furtively at the Honorable Betty.

"He knows all?" asked her Highness, her chin tilted aggressively.

"Everything."

"What must you think of me?" There was

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that in her Highness' tone which dared me to express any opinion that was not totally complimentary.

"I am not sufficiently well-born to pass an opinion upon your Highness' actions," I replied, with excusable irony.

"Excellent!" she exclaimed. "I have grown weary of sycophants. You are not afraid of me at all."

"Not in the slightest degree," I declared.

"You will not regret what you are about to do. I can make it very pleasant for you in Barscheit—or very unpleasant." But this threatening supplement was made harmless by the accompanying smile.

"May I offer the advice of rather a worldly man?"

"Well?"

"When Steinbock comes bid him go about his business."

The Honorable Betty nodded approvingly, but her Highness shrugged.

"Since you are decided,"—and I bowed. "Now, what time does this fellow put in his appearance?"

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Her Highness beamed upon the Honorable Betty. "I like the way he says 'this fellow'; it reassures me. He is due at nine o'clock; that is to say, in half an hour. I will give you these directions. I do not wish Steinbock to know of your presence here. You will hide in the salon, close to the portières, within call. Moreover, I shall have to impose upon you the disagreeable duty of playing the listener. Let nothing escape your ear or your eye. I am not certain of this fellow Steinbock, though I hold a sword above his head."

"But where are your men?" I asked.

She smiled. "There is no one here but Leopold."

"Your Highness to meet Steinbock alone?"

"I have no fear of him; he knows who I am."

"Everything shall be done as you wish." I secretly hoped I might have the opportunity to punch Steinbock's head.

"Thank you." The transition of her moods always left me in wonder. "Play something; it is impossible to talk." She perched herself on the broad arm of the Honorable Betty's chair, and her

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arm rested lightly but affectionately on her shoulder.

It was something for a man to gain the confidence, in so short a time, of two such women. I felt as brave as Bayard. So I sat down before the piano and played. My two accomplishments are horseback riding and music, and I candidly tell you that I am as reckless at one as at the other. I had a good memory. I played something from Chaminade, as her fancies are always airy and agreeable and unmelancholy. I was attacking *The Flatterer* when her Highness touched my arm.

“Hark!”

We all listened intently. The sound of beating hoofs came distinctly. A single horseman was galloping along the highway toward the castle. The sound grew nearer and nearer; presently it ceased. I rose quietly.

“It is time I hid myself, for doubtless this rider is the man.”

The princess paled for a moment, while her companion nervously plucked at the edges of her handkerchief.

“Go,” said the former; “and be watchful.”

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I then took up my position behind the portières. Truly I had stumbled into an adventure; but how to stumble out again? If the duke got wind of it, it would mean my recall, and I was of a mind, just then, that I was going to be particularly fond of Barscheit.

All was silent. A door closed, and then came the tread of feet. I peered through the portières shortly to see the entrance of two men, one of whom was the old caretaker. His companion was a dark, handsome fellow, of Hungarian gipsy type. There was a devil-may-care air about him that fitted him well. It was Steinbock. He was dressed with scrupulous care, in spite of the fact that he wore riding clothes. It is possible that he recognized the importance of the event. One did not write one's name under a princess' signature every day, even in mockery. There was a half-smile on his face that I did not like.

"Your Highness sees that I am prompt,"—uncovering.

"It is well. Let us proceed at once to conclude the matter in hand," she said.

"Wholly at your service!"

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(Hang the fellow's impudence! How dared he use that jovial tone?)

I heard the crackle of parchment. The certificate was being unfolded. (It occurred to me that while she was about it the princess might just as well have forged the rascal's name and wholly dispensed with his services. The whole affair struck me as being ineffective; nothing would come of it. If she tried to make the duke believe that she had married Steinbock, her uncle would probe the matter to the bottom, and in the end cover her with ridicule. But you can not tell a young woman anything, when she is a princess and in the habit of having her own way. It is remarkable how stupid clever women can be at times. The Honorable Betty understood, but her Highness would not be convinced. Thus she suffered this needless affront. Pardon this parenthesis, but when one talks from behind a curtain the parenthesis is the only available thing.) There was silence. I saw Steinbock poise the pen, then scribble on the parchment. It was done. I stirred restlessly.

"There!" cried Steinbock. His voice did not

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lack a certain triumph. "And now for the duplicate!"

Her Highness stuffed the document into the bosom of her dress. "There will be no duplicate." The frigidity of her tones would have congealed the blood of an ordinary rascal. But Steinbock was not ordinary.

"But suppose the duke comes to me for verification?" he reasoned.

"You will be on the other side of the frontier. Here are your thousand crowns."

The barb of her contempt penetrated even his thick epidermis. His smile hardened.

"I was once a gentleman; I did not always accept money for aiding in shady transactions."

"Neither your sentiments nor your opinions are required. Now, observe me carefully," continued her Highness. "I shall give you twenty-four hours to cross the frontier in any direction you choose. If after that time you are found in Barscheit, I promise to hand you over to the police."

"It has been a great day," said the rascal, with a laugh. "A thousand crowns!"

I separated the portières an inch. He stood at

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the side of the piano, upon which he leaned an elbow. He was certainly handsome, much sought after by women of a low class. The princess stood at Steinbock's left and the Honorable Betty at his right, erect, their faces expressing nothing, so forced was the repose.

"I never expected so great an honor. To wed a princess, when that princess is your Highness! Faith, it is fine!"

"You may go at once," interrupted her Highness, her voice rising a key. "Remember, you have only twenty-four hours between you and prison. You waste valuable time."

"What! you wish to be rid of me so soon? Why, this is the bridal night. One does not part with one's wife at this rate."

Leopold, the caretaker, made a warning gesture.

"Come, Leopold, I must have my jest," laughed Steinbock.

"Within certain bounds," returned the old man phlegmatically. "It is high time you were off. You are foolhardy to match your chances with justice. Prison stares you in the face."

"Bah! Do you believe it?"

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"It is a positive fact," added the princess.

"But to leave like this has the pang of death!" Steinbock remonstrated. "What! shall I be off without having even kissed the bride?"

"The bargain is concluded on all sides; you have your thousand crowns."

"But not love's tribute. I must have that. It is worth a thousand crowns. Besides," with a perceptible change in his manner, "shall I forget the contempt with which you have always looked upon me, even in the old days that were fair and prosperous? Scarcely! Opportunity is a thing that can not be permitted to pass thus lightly." Then I observed his nose wrinkle; he was sniffing. "Tobacco! I did not know that you smoked, Leopold."

"Begone!" cried the old fellow, his hands opening and shutting.

"Presently!" With a laugh he sprang toward her Highness, but Leopold was too quick for him.

There was a short struggle, and I saw the valiant old man reel, fall and strike his head on the stone of the hearth. He lay perfectly motionless. So unexpected was this scene to my eyes that for a

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time I was without any particular sense of movement. I stood like stone. With an evil laugh Steinbock sprang toward her Highness again. Quick as light she snatched up my crop, which lay on the table, and struck the rascal full across the eyes, again and again and again, following him as he stepped backward. Her defense was magnificent. But, as fate determined to have it, Steinbock finally succeeded in wresting the stick from her grasp. He was wild with pain and chagrin. It was then I awoke to the fact that I was needed.

I rushed out, hot with anger. I caught Steinbock by the collar just in time to prevent his lips from touching her cheek. I flung him to the floor, and knelt upon his chest. I am ashamed to confess it, but I recollect slapping the fellow's face as he struggled under me.

"You scoundrel!" I cried, breathing hard.

"Kill him!" whispered her Highness. She was furious; the blood of her marauding ancestors swept over her cheeks, and if ever I saw murder in a woman's eyes it was at that moment.

"Hush, Hildegarde, hush!" The English girl caught the princess in her arms and drew her

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back. "Don't let me hear you talk like that. It is all over."

"Get up," I said to Steinbock, as I set him free.

He crawled to his feet. He was very much disordered, and there were livid welts on his face. He shook himself, eying me evilly. There was murder in his eyes, too.

"Empty your pockets of those thousand crowns!"—peremptorily.

"I was certain that I smelled tobacco," he sneered. "It would seem that there are other bridegrooms than myself."

"Those crowns, or I'll break every bone in your body!" I balled my fists. Nothing would have pleased me better at that moment than to pummel the life out of him.

Slowly he drew out the purse. It was one of those limp silk affairs so much affected by our ancestors. He balanced it on his hand. Its ends bulged with gold and bank-notes. Before I was aware of his intention, he swung one end of it in so deft a manner that it struck me squarely between the eyes. With a crash of glass he disappeared through the window. The blow dazed

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me only for a moment, and I was hot to be on his tracks. The Honorable Betty stopped me.

"He may shoot you!" she cried. "Don't go!"

Although half through the window, I crawled back, brushing my sleeves. Something warm trickled down my nose.

"You have been cut!" exclaimed her Highness.

"It is nothing. I beg of you to let me follow. It will be all over with that fellow at large."

"Not at all." Her Highness' eyes sparkled wickedly. "He will make for the nearest frontier. He knows now that I shall not hesitate a moment to put his affairs in the hands of the police."

"He will boast of what he has done."

"Not till he has spent those thousand crowns." She crossed the room and knelt at the side of Leopold, dashing some water into his face. Presently he opened his eyes. "He is only stunned. Poor Leopold!"

I helped the old man to his feet, and he rubbed the back of his head grimly. He drew a revolver from his pocket.

"I had forgotten all about it," he said con-

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tritely. "Shall I follow him, your Highness?"

"Let him go. It doesn't matter now. Betty, you were right, as you always are. I have played the part of a silly fool. I *would* have my own way in the matter. Well, I have this worthless paper. At least I can frighten the duke, and that is something."

"Oh, my dear, if only you would have listened to my advice!" the other girl said. There was deep discouragement in her tones. "I warned you so often that it would come to this end."

"Let us drop the matter entirely," said her Highness.

I gazed admiringly at her—to see her sink suddenly into a chair and weep abandonedly! Leopold eyed her mournfully, while the English girl rushed to her side and flung her arms around her soothingly.

"I am very unhappy," said the princess, lifting her head and shaking the tears from her eyes. "I am harassed on all sides; I am not allowed any will of my own. I wish I were a peasant!—Thank you, thank you! But for you that wretch would have kissed me." She held out her hand to me, and I bent to one knee as I kissed it. She was

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worthy to be the wife of the finest fellow in all the world. I was very sorry for her, and thought many uncomplimentary things of the duke.

"I shall not ask you to forget my weakness," she said.

"It is already forgotten, your Highness."

Under such circumstances I met the Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit; and I never betrayed her confidence until this writing, when I have her express permission.

Of Hermann Steinbock I never saw anything more. Thus the only villain passes from the scene. As I have repeatedly remarked, doubtless to your weariness, this is not my story at all; but in parenthesis I may add that between the Honorable Betty Moore and myself there sprang up a friendship which later ripened into something infinitely stronger.

This, then, was the state of affairs when, one month later, Max Scharfenstein poked his handsome blond head over the frontier of Barscheit; cue (as the dramatist would say), enter hero.

IV

He came straight to the consulate, and I was so glad to see him that I sat him down in front of the sideboard and left orders that I was at home to no one. We had been class-mates and room-mates at college, and two better friends never lived. We spent the whole night in recounting the good old days, sighed a little over the departed ones, and praised or criticized the living. Hadn't they been times, though? The nights we had stolen up to Philadelphia to see the shows, the great Thanksgiving games in New York, the commencements, and all that!

Max had come out of the far West. He was a foundling who had been adopted by a wealthy German ranchman named Scharfenstein, which name Max assumed as his own, it being as good as any. Nobody knew anything about Max's antecedents, but he was so big and handsome and jolly that no one cared a hang. For all that he did not know his parentage, he was a gentleman, some-

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thing that has to be bred in the bone. Once or twice I remember seeing him angry; in anger he was arrogant, deadly, but calm. He was a god in track-linen, for he was what few big men are, quick and agile. The big fellow who is cat-like in his movements is the most formidable of athletes. One thing that invariably amused me was his inordinate love of uniforms. He would always stop when he saw a soldier or the picture of one, and his love of arms was little short of a mania. He was an expert fencer and a dead shot besides. (Pardon the parenthesis, but I feel it my duty to warn you that nobody fights a duel in this little history, and nobody gets killed.)

On leaving college he went in for medicine, and his appearance in the capital city of Barscheit was due obviously to the great medical college, famous the world over for its nerve specialists. This was Max's first adventure in the land of gutturals. I explained to him, and partly unraveled, the tangle of laws; as to the language, he spoke that, not like a native, but as one.

Max was very fond of the society of women, and at college we used to twit him about it, for he was always eager to meet a new face, trusting that the

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new one might be the ideal for which he was searching.

"Well, you old Dutchman," said I, "have you ever found that ideal woman of yours?"

"Bah!"—lighting a pipe. "She will never be found. A horse and a trusty dog for me; those two you may eventually grow to understand. Of course I don't say, if the woman came along—the right one—I mightn't go under. I'm philosopher enough to admit that possibility. I want her tall, hair like corn-silk, eyes like the corn-flower, of brilliant intellect, reserved, and dignified, and patient. I want a woman, not humorous, but who understands humor, and I have never heard of one. So, you see, it's all smoke; and I never talk woman these times unless I'm smoking,"—with a gesture which explained that he had given up the idea altogether. "A doctor sees so much of women that he finally sees nothing of woman."

"Oh, if you resort to epigrams, I can see that it's all over."

"All over. I'm so used to being alone that I shouldn't know what to do with a wife." He puffed seriously.

Ah! the futility of our desires, of our castles, of

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our dreams! The complacency with which we jog along in what we deem to be our own particular groove! I recall a girl friend of my youth who was going to be a celibate, a great reformer, and toward that end was studying for the pulpit. She is now the mother of several children, the most peaceful and unorative woman I know. You see, humanity goes whirring over various side-tracks, thinking them to be the main line, till fate puts its peculiar but happy hand to the switch. Scharfstein had been plugging away over rusty rails and grass-grown ties — till he came to Barscheit.

“Hope is the wings of the heart,” said I, when I thought the pause had grown long enough. “You still hope?”

“In a way. If I recollect, you had an affair once,”— shrewdly.

I smoked on. I wasn’t quite ready to speak.

“You were always on the hunt for ideals, too, as I remember; hope you’ll find her.”

“Max, my boy, I am solemnly convinced that I have.”

“Good Lord, you don’t mean to tell me that you are *hooked*?” he cried.

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"I see no reason why you should use that particular tone," I answered stiffly.

"Oh, come now; tell me all about it. Who is she, and when's the wedding?"

"I don't know when the wedding's going to be, but I'm mighty sure that I have met the one girl. Max, there never was a girl like her. Witty she is, and wise; as beautiful as a summer's dawn; merry and brave; rides, drives, plays the 'cello, dances like a moon-shadow; and all that,"—with a wave of the hand.

"You've got it bad. Remember how you used to write poetry at college? Who is she, if I may ask?"

"The Honorable Betty Moore, at present the guest of her Highness, the Princess Hildegarde,"—with pardonable pride.

Max whistled. "You're a lucky beggar. One by one we turn traitor to our native land. A Britisher! I never should have believed it of you, of the man whose class declamation was on the fiery subject of patriotism. But is it all on one side?"

"I don't know, Max; sometimes I think so, and then I don't."

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"How long have you known her?"

"Little more than a month."

"A month? Everything moves swiftly these days, except European railway cars."

"There's a romance, Max, but another besides her is concerned, and I can not tell you. Some day, when everything quiets down, I'll get you into a corner with a bottle, and you will find it worth while."

"The bottle?"

"Both."

"From rumors I've heard, this princess is a great one for larks; rides bicycles and automobiles, and generally raises the deuce. What sort is she?"

"If you are going to remain in Barscheit, my boy, take a friendly warning. Do not make any foolish attempt to see her. She is more fascinating than a roulette table."

This was a sly dig. Max smiled. A recent letter from him had told of an encounter with the goddess of Monte Carlo. Fortune had been all things but favorable.

"I'm not afraid of your princess; besides, I came here to study."

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"And study hard, my boy, study hard. Her Highness is not the only pretty woman in Barscheit. There's a raft of them."

"I'll paddle close to the shore," with a smile.

"By the way, I'll wake you up Thursday."

"How?"—lazily.

"A bout at Müller's Rathskeller. Half a dozen American lads, one of whom is called home. Just fixed up his passports for him. You'll be as welcome as the flowers in the spring. Some of the lads will be in your classes."

"Put me down. It will be like old times. I went to the reunion last June. Everything was in its place but you. Hang it, why can't time always go on as it did then?"

"Time, unlike our watches, never has to go to the jeweler's for repairs," said I owlshly.

Max leaned over, took my bull-terrier by the neck and deposited him on his lap.

"Good pup, Artie — if he's anything like his master. Three years, my boy, since I saw you. And here you are, doing nothing and lallygagging at court with the nobility. I wish I had had an uncle who was a senator. 'Pull' is everything these days."

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"You Dutchman, I won this place on my own merit,"—indignantly.

"Forget it!"—grinning.

"You are impertinent."

"But truthful, always."

And then we smoked a while in silence. The silent friend is the best of the lot. He knows that he hasn't got to talk unless he wants to, and likewise that it is during these lapses of speech that the vine of friendship grows and tightens about the heart. When you sit beside a man and feel that you need not labor to entertain him it's a good sign that you thoroughly understand each other. I was first to speak.

"I don't understand why you should go in for medicine so thoroughly. It can't be money, for heaven knows your father left you a yearly income which alone would be a fortune to me."

"Chivalry shivers these days; the chill of money is on everything. A man must do something—a man who is neither a sloth nor a fool. A man must have something to put his whole heart into; and I despise money as money. I give away the bulk of my income."

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"Marry, and then you will not have to," I said flippantly.

"You're a sad dog. Do you know, I've been thinking about epigrams."

"No!"

"Yes. I find that an epigram is produced by the same cause that produces the pearl in the oyster."

"That is to say, a healthy mentality never superinduces an epigram? Fudge!" said I, yanking the pup from his lap on to mine. "According to your diagnosis, your own mind is diseased."

"Have I cracked an epigram?"—with pained surprise.

"Well, you nearly bent one," I compromised.

Then we both laughed, and the pup started up and licked my face before I could prevent him.

"Did I ever show you this?"—taking out a locket which was attached to one end of his watch-chain. He passed the trinket to me.

"What is it?" I asked, turning it over and over.

"It's the one slender link that connects me with my babyhood. It was around my neck when

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Scharfenstein picked me up. Open it and look at the face inside."

I did so. A woman's face peered up at me. It might have been beautiful but for the troubled eyes and the drooping lips. It was German in type, evidently of high breeding, possessing the subtle lines which distinguish the face of the noble from the peasant's. From the woman's face I glanced at Max's. The eyes were something alike.

"Who do you think it is?" I asked, when I had studied the face sufficiently to satisfy my curiosity.

"I've a sneaking idea that it may be my mother. Scharfenstein found me toddling about in a railroad station, and that locket was the only thing about me that might be used in the matter of identification. You will observe that there is no lettering, not even the jeweler's usual carat-mark to qualify the gold. I recall nothing; life with me dates only from the wide plains and grazing cattle. I was born either in Germany or Austria. That's all I know. And to tell you the honest truth, boy, it's the reason I've placed my woman-ideal so high. So long as I place her over my head I'm not foolish enough to weaken into thinking I

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can have her. What woman wants a man without a name?"

"You poor old Dutchman, you! You can buy a genealogy with your income. And a woman nowadays marries the man, the man. It's only horses, dogs and cattle that we buy for their pedigrees. Come; you ought to have a strawberry mark on your arm," I suggested lightly; for there were times when Max brooded over the mystery which enveloped his birth.

In reply he rolled up his sleeve and bared a mighty arm. Where the vaccination scar usually is I saw a red patch, like a burn. I leaned over and examined it. It was a four-pointed scar, with a perfect circle around it. Somehow, it seemed to me that this was not the first time I had seen this peculiar mark. I did not recollect ever seeing it on Max's arm. Where had I seen it, then?

"It looks like a burn," I ventured to suggest.

"It is. I wish I knew what it signifies. Scharfenstein said that it was positively fresh when he found me. He said I cried a good deal and kept telling him that I was Max. Maybe I'm an anarchist and don't know it,"—with half a smile.

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"It's a curious scar. Hang me, but I've seen the device somewhere before!"

"You have?"—eagerly. "Where, where?"

"I don't know; possibly I saw it on your arm in the old days."

He sank back in his chair. Silence, during which the smoke thickened and the pup whined softly in his sleep. Out upon the night the cathedral bell boomed the third hour of morning.

"If you don't mind, Artie," said Max, yawning, "I'll turn in. I've been traveling for the past fortnight."

"Take a ride on Dandy in the morning. He'll hold your weight nicely. I can't go with you, as I've a lame ankle."

"I'll be in the saddle at dawn. All I need is a couple of hours between sheets."

As I prodded my pillow into a comfortable wad under my cheek I wondered where I had seen that particular brand. It *was* a brand. I knew that I had seen it somewhere, but my memory danced away when I endeavored to halter it. Soon I fell asleep, dreaming of Somebody who wasn't Max Scharfenstein, by a long shot.

V

That same evening the grand duke's valet knocked on the door leading into the princess' apartments, and when the door opened he gravely announced that his serene Highness desired to speak to the Princess Hildegarde. It was a command. For some reason, known best to herself, the princess chose to obey it.

"Say that I shall be there presently," she said, dismissing the valet.

As she entered her uncle's study — so called because of its dust-laden bookshelves, though the duke sometimes disturbed their contents to steady the leg of an unbalanced chair or table — he laid down his pipe and dismissed his small company of card-players.

"I did not expect to see you so soon," he began. "A woman's curiosity sometimes has its value. It takes little to arouse it, but a great deal to allay it."

"You have not summoned me to make smart

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speeches, simply because I have been educated up to them? ”— truculently.

“ No. I have not summoned you to talk smart, a word much in evidence in Barscheit since your return from England. For once I am going to use a woman’s prerogative. I have changed my mind.”

The Princess Hildegarde trembled with delight. She could put but one meaning to his words.

“ The marriage will not take place next month.”

“ Uncle! ”— rapturously.

“ Wait a moment,”— grimly. “ It shall take place next week.”

“ I warn you not to force me to the altar,” cried the girl, trembling this time with a cold fury.

“ My child, you are too young in spirit and too old in mind to be allowed a gateless pasture. In harness you will do very well.” He took up his pipe and primed it. It *was* rather embarrassing to look the girl in the eye. “ You shall wed Doppelkinn next week.”

“ You will find it rather embarrassing to drag me to the altar,”— evenly.

“ You will not,” he replied, “ create a scandal of

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such magnitude. You are untamable, but you are proud."

The girl remained silent. In her heart she knew that he had spoken truly. She could never make a scene in the cathedral. But she was determined never to enter it. She wondered if she should produce the bogus certificate. She decided to wait and see if there were no other loophole of escape. Old *Rotnäsigg*? Not if she died!

When these two talked without apparent heat it was with unalterable fixedness of purpose. They were of a common race. The duke was determined that she should wed Doppelkinn; she was equally determined that she should not. The gentleman with the algebraic bump may figure this out to suit himself.

"Have you no pity?"

"My reason overshadows it. You do not suppose that I take any especial pleasure in forcing you? But you leave me no other method."

"I am a young girl, and he is an old man."

"That is immaterial. Besides, the fact has gone abroad. It is now irrevocable."

"I promise to go out and ask the first man I see to marry me!" she declared.

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"Pray Heaven, it may be Doppelkinn!" said the duke drolly.

"Oh, do not doubt that I have the courage and the recklessness. I would not care if he were young, but the prince is old enough to be my father."

"You are not obliged to call him husband." The duke possessed a sparkle to-night which was unusual in him. Perhaps he had won some of the state moneys which he had paid out to his ministers that day. "Let us not waste any time," he added.

"I shall not waste any,"—ominously.

"Order your gown from Vienna, or Paris, or from wherever you will. Don't haggle over the price; let it be a good one; I'm willing to go deep for it."

"You loved my aunt once,"—a broken note in her voice.

"I love her still,"—not unkindly; "but I must have peace in the house. Observe what you have so far accomplished in the matter of creating turmoil." The duke took up a paper.

"My sins?"—contemptuously.

"Let us call them your transgressions. Listen. You have ridden a horse as a man rides it; you

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have ridden bicycles in public streets; you have stolen away to a masked ball; you ran away from school in Paris and visited Heaven knows whom; you have bribed sentries to let you in when you were out late; you have thrust aside the laws as if they meant nothing; you have trifled with the state papers and caused the body politic to break up a meeting as a consequence of the laughter."

The girl, as she recollected this day to which he referred, laughed long and joyously. He waited patiently till she had done, and I am not sure that his mouth did not twist under his beard. "Foreign education is the cause of all this," he said finally. "Those cursed French and English schools have ruined you. And I was fool enough to send you to them. This is the end."

"Or the beginning,"—rebelliously.

"Doppelkinn is mild and kind."

"Mild and kind! One would think that you were marrying me to a horse! Well, I shall not enter the cathedral."

"How will you avoid it?"—calmly.

"I shall find a way; wait and see." She was determined.

"I shall wait." Then, with a sudden softening,

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for he loved the girl after his fashion: "I am growing old, my child. If I should die, what would become of you? I have no son; your Uncle Franz, who is but a year or two younger than I am, would reign, and he would not tolerate your madcap ways. You must marry at once. I love you in spite of your wilfulness. But you have shown yourself incapable of loving. Doppelkinn is wealthy. You shall marry him."

"I will run away, uncle,"—decidedly.

"I have notified the frontiers,"—tranquilly. "From now on you will be watched. It is the inevitable, my child, and even I have to bow to that."

She touched the paper in her bosom, but paused.

"Moreover, I have decided," went on the duke, "to send the Honorable Betty Moore back to England."

"Betty?"

"Yes. She is a charming young person, but she is altogether too sympathetic. She abets you in all you do. Her English independence does not conform with my ideas. After the wedding I shall notify her father."

"Everything, everything! My friends, my liberty, the right God gives to every woman — to

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love whom she will! And you, my uncle, rob me of these things! What if I should tell you that marriage with me is now impossible?"—her lips growing thin.

"I should not be very much surprised."

"Please look at this, then, and you will understand why I can not marry Doppelkinn." She thrust the bogus certificate into his hands.

The duke read it carefully, not a muscle in his face disturbed. Finally he looked up with a terrifying smile.

"Poor, foolish child! What a terrible thing this might have turned out to be!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Do you suppose anything like this could take place without my hearing of it? And such a dishonest unscrupulous rascal! Some day I shall thank the American consul personally for his part in the affair. I was waiting to see when you would produce this. You virtually placed your honor and reputation, which I know to be above reproach, into the keeping of a man who would sell his soul for a thousand crowns."

The girl felt her knees give way, and she sat

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down. Tears slowly welled up in her eyes and overflowed, blurring everything.

The duke got up and went over to his desk, rummaging among the papers. He returned to the girl with a letter.

"Read that, and learn the treachery of the man you trusted."

The letter was written by Steinbock. In it he disclosed all. It was a venomous, insulting letter. The girl crushed it in her hand.

"Is he dead?" she asked, all the bitterness in her heart surging to her lips.

"To Barscheit,"—briefly. "Now, what shall I do with this?"—tapping the bogus certificate.

"Give it to me," said the girl wearily. She ripped it into halves, into quarters, into infinitesimal squares, and tossed them into the waste-basket.

"I am the unhappiest girl in the world."

"I am sorry," replied the grand duke. "It isn't as if I had forced Doppelkinn on you without first letting you have your choice. You have rejected the princes of a dozen wealthy countries. We are not as the common people; we can not marry where we will. I shall announce that the marriage will take place next week."

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"Do not send my friend away," she pleaded, apparently tamed.

"I will promise to give the matter thought. Good night."

She turned away without a word and left him. When he roared at her she knew by experience that he was harmless; but this quiet determination meant the exclusion of any further argument. There was no escape unless she ran away. She wept on her pillow that night, not so much at the thought of wedding Doppelkinn as at the fact that Prince Charming had evidently missed the last train and was never coming to wake her up, or, if he did come, it would be when it was too late. How many times had she conjured him up, as she rode in the fresh fairness of the mornings! How manly he was and how his voice thrilled her! Her horse was suddenly to run away, he was to rescue her, and then demand her hand in marriage as a fitting reward. Sometimes he had black hair and eyes, but more often he was big and tall, with yellow hair and the bluest eyes in all the world.

VI

The princess rose at dawn the following day. She routed out Hans, the head groom, and told him to saddle Artemis, the slim-limbed, seal-brown filly which an English nobleman had given to her. Ten minutes later she was in the saddle, and the heaviness on her heart seemed to rise and vanish like the opal mists on the bosom of the motionless lake. A pale star blinked at her, and the day, flushed like the cheek of a waking infant, began drowsily to creep over the rolling mountains.

How silent all the city was! Only here and there above the chimneys rose a languid film of smoke. The gates of the park shut behind her with a clang, and so for a time she was alone and free. She touched Artemis with a spur, and the filly broke into a canter toward the lake road. The girl's nostrils dilated. Every flower, the thousand resinous saps of the forest, the earth itself, yielded up a cool sweet perfume that was to the mind what a glass of wine is to the blood, exhilaration.

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Mottled with pink, and gray, and blue, and gold, the ever-changing hues of the morning, the surface of the lake was as smooth as her mirror and, like it, always reflecting beauty. Fish leaped forth and fell with a sounding splash, and the circles would widen and gradually vanish. A black-bird dipped among the silent rushes; a young fox barked importantly; a hawk flashed by. The mists swam hither and thither mysteriously, growing thinner and fainter as the gold of day grew brighter and clearer. Suddenly — in the words of the old tent-maker — the false morning died, and it was day.

I'm afraid that somewhere among the princess' ancestors there was a troubadour; for she was something of a poet. Indeed, I have already remarked that she wrote verses. The atmospheric change of the morning turned her mind into sentimental channels. How she envied the peasant woman, who might come and go at will, sleep in the open or in the hut, loving or hating with perfect freedom! Ah, Prince Charming, Prince Charming! where were you? Why did you loiter? Perhaps for her there *was* no Prince Charming. It might be so. She sighed.

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She would never marry Doppelkinn — never. That horrible Steinbock! She was glad, glad that she had struck him, again and again, across his lying eyes and evil mouth. She had believed that she knew the world; it was all yet a mystery; the older she grew the less she understood. Wasn't anybody good? Was everybody to be distrusted? Which way should she turn now? The world was beautiful enough; it was the people in it. Poor Betty! She had her troubles, too; but somehow she refused to confide them. She acted very much as if she were in love.

She gazed at the hawk enviously. How proud and free he was, so high up there, circling and circling. Even the fox was freer than she; the forests were his, and he might go whither he listed. And the fish that leaped in frolic from the water, and the blackbird in the rushes! She could not understand.

She would never marry Doppelkinn — never.

But how should she escape — how? On Wednesday night she would be given her quarterly allowance of a thousand crowns, and on Thursday she must act. . . . Yes, yes, that was it! How simple! She would slip over into Doppelkinn, where

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they never would think to search for her. She knew a place in which to hide. From Doppelkinn she would go straight to Dresden and seek the protection of her old governess, who would hide her till the duke came to his senses. If only she had an independent fortune, how she would snap her fingers at them all!

She was distracted by the sound of jangling steel. Artemis had cast a shoe. How annoying! It would take ten minutes to reach old Bauer's smithy, and ten minutes more to put on a shoe. She brought the filly down to a walk.

What was the use of being a princess if one was not allowed to act in a royal fashion? It wasn't so terrible to wear men's clothes, and, besides, they were very comfortable for riding a horse; and as for riding a bicycle in the public streets, hadn't that ugly Italian duchess ridden through the streets of Rome, and in knickerbockers, too? Nobody seemed to mind it there. But in Barscheit it had been little short of a crime. She recalled the flaming fagots and the red-hot wire of her unfortunate wheel. A smile rippled over her face, but it passed quickly. There was nothing left to smile over. They were going to force her to marry a

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tomb, a man in whom love and courage and joy were as dead things. Woe to Doppelkinn, though — woe to him! She would lead him a dance, wild and terrible.

If only she were Betty, free to do what she pleased, to go and come at will! She wasn't born to be a princess; she wasn't commonplace enough; she enjoyed life too well. Ah, if only she might live and act like those English cousins of hers with whom she went to school! *They* could ride man-fashion, hunt man-fashion, shoot, play cards and bet at the races man-fashion, and nobody threatened *them* with Doppelkinns. They might dance, too, till the sun came into the windows and the rouge on their faces cracked. But *she*! (I use the italics to illustrate the decided nods of her pretty head.) Why, every sweet had to be stolen!

She would never marry Doppelkinn — never. She would never watch his old nose grow purple at the table. She would run away. And since Prince Charming was nowhere to be seen, it were better to die an old maid.

Presently the smithy came into view, emerging from a cluster of poplars. She rode up to the doors, dismounted and entered. Old Bauer him-

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self was at the bellows, and the weird blue light hissing up from the blown coals discovered another customer. She turned and met his frank glance of admiration. (If she hadn't turned! If his admiration hadn't been entirely frank!) Instantly she sent Bauer a warning glance which that old worthy seemed immediately to understand. The stranger was tall, well-made, handsome, with yellow hair, and eyes as blue as the sky is when the west wind blows.

He raised his cap, and the heart of the girl fluttered. Wherever had this seemly fellow come from?

"Good morning," said the stranger courteously. "I see that you have had the same misfortune as myself."

"You have lost a shoe? Rather annoying, when one doesn't want a single break in the going." She uttered the words carelessly, as if she wasn't at all interested.

The stranger stuffed his cap into a pocket.

She was glad that she had chosen the new saddle. The crest and coat of arms had not yet been burned upon the leather nor engraved upon the silver ornaments, and there was no blanket under

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the English saddle. There might be an adventure; one could not always tell. She must hide her identity. If the stranger knew that she belonged to the House of Barscheit, possibly he would be frightened and take to his heels.

But the Princess Hildegarde did not know that this stranger never took to his heels; he wasn't that kind. Princess or peasant, it would have been all the same to him. Only his tone might have lost half a key.

Bauer called to his assistant, and the girl stepped out into the road. The stranger followed, as she knew he would. It will be seen that she knew something of men, if only that they possess curiosity.

"What a beautiful place this is!" the stranger ventured, waving his hand toward the still lake and the silent, misty mountains.

"There is no place quite like it," she admitted. "You are a stranger in Barscheit?"—politely. He was young and certainly the best-looking man she had seen in a month of moons. If Doppelkinn, now, were only more after this pattern!

"Yes, this is my first trip to Barscheit." He had a very engaging smile.

"You are from Vienna?"

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“No.”

“Ah, from Berlin. I was not quite sure of the accent.”

“I am a German-American,”—frankly. “I have always spoken the language as if it were my own, which doubtless it is.”

“America!” she cried, her interest genuinely aroused. “That is the country where every one does just as he pleases.”

“Sometimes.” (What beautiful teeth she had, white as skimmed milk!)

“They are free?”

“Nearly always.”

“They tell me that women there are all queens.”

“We are there, or here, always your humble servants.”

He was evidently a gentleman; there was something in his bow that was courtly. “And do the women attend the theaters alone at night?”

“If they desire to.”

“Tell me, does the daughter of the president have just as much liberty as her subjects?”

“Even more. Only, there are no subjects in America.”

“No subjects? What do they call them, then?”

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"Voters."

"And do the women vote?"

"Only at the women's clubs."

She did not quite get this; not that it was too subtle, rather that it was not within her comprehension.

"It is a big country?"

"Ever so big."

"Do you like it?"

"I love every inch of it. I have even fought for it."

"In the Spanish War?"—visibly excited.

"Yes."

"Were you a major or a colonel?"

"Neither; only a private."

"I thought every soldier there was either a colonel or a major."

He looked at her sharply, but her eye was roving. He became suspicious. She might be simple, and then again she mightn't. She was worth studying, anyhow.

"I was a cavalryman, with nothing to do but obey orders and, when ordered, fight. I am visiting the American consul here; he was a school-mate of mine."

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"Ah! I thought I recognized the horse."

"You know him?"—quickly.

"Oh,"—casually,—"every one hereabouts has seen the consul on his morning rides. He rides like a centaur, they say; but I have never seen a centaur."

The stranger laughed. She was charming.

"He ought to ride well; I taught him." But the gay smile which followed this statement robbed it of its air of conceit. "You see, I have ridden part of my life on the great plains of the West, and have mounted everything from a wild Indian pony to an English thoroughbred. My name is Max Scharfenstein, and I am here as a medical student, though in my own country I have the right to hang out a physician's shingle."

She drew aimless figures in the dust with her riding-crop. There was no sense in her giving any name. Probably they would never meet again. And yet —

"I am Hildegarde von — von Heideloff," giving her mother's name. He was too nice to frighten away.

The hesitance over the "von" did not strike his usually keen ear. He was too intent on noting the

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variant expressions on her exquisite face. It was a pity she was dark. What a figure, and how proudly the head rested upon the slender but firm white throat! After all, black eyes, such as these were, might easily rival any blue eyes he had ever seen. (Which goes to prove that a man's ideals are not built as solidly as might be.)

"It is rather unusual," he said, "to see a woman ride so early; but you have the right idea. Everything begins to wake, life, the air, the day. There is something in the dew of the morning that is a better tonic than any doctor can brew."

"Take care! If you have no confidence in your wares, you must not expect your patients to have."

"Oh, I am a doctor of philosophy, also."

"That is to say," she observed, "if you lose your patients, you will accept their loss without a murmur? Very good. May I ask what you have come so far to study?"

"Nerves."

"Is it possible!"—with a smile as fleet as the wind.

He laughed. This was almost like an American girl. How easy it was to talk to her! He tried again to catch her eye, but failed. Then both

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looked out over the lake, mutually consenting that a pause should ensue. He did not mind the dark hair at all.

"Do you speak English?" she asked abruptly in that tongue, with a full glance to note the effect.

"English is spoken to some extent in the United States," he answered gravely. He did not evince the least surprise at her fluency.

"Do you write to the humorous papers in your country?"

"Only to subscribe for them," said he.

And again they laughed; which was a very good sign that things were going forward tolerably well.

And then the miserable fellow of a smith had to come out and announce that the stranger's horse was ready.

"I'll warrant the shoe," said Bauer.

"You haven't lost any time," said Max, his regret evident to every one.

The girl smiled approvingly. She loved humor in a man, and this one with the yellow hair and blue eyes seemed to possess a fund of the dry sort. All this was very wrong, she knew, but she wasn't go-

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ing to be the princess this morning; she was going to cast off the shell of artificiality, of etiquette.

"How much will this shoe cost me?" Max asked.

"Half a crown," said Bauer, with a sly glance at the girl to see how she would accept so exorbitant a sum. The princess frowned. "But sometimes," added Bauer hurriedly, "I do it for nothing."

"Bauer, your grandfather was a robber," the girl laughed. "Take heed that you do not follow in his footsteps."

"I am a poor man, your — mm — Fräulein," he stammered.

"Here's a crown," said Max, tossing a coin which was neatly caught by the grimy hand of the smith.

"Are you very rich?" asked the girl curiously.

"Why?" counter-questioned Max.

"Oh, I am curious to know. Bauer will tell it to every one in Barscheit that you overpay for things, and from now on you will have to figure living on a basis of crowns."

It is worth any price to hear a pretty woman laugh. What a fine beginning for a day!

"May misfortune be kind enough to bring you

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this way again, Herr!" Bauer cried joyfully, not to say ambiguously.

"Listen to that!" laughed the girl, her eyes shining like the water in the sun. "But he means only to thank your generosity. Now,"—with a severe frown,—“how much do I owe you? Take care; I've only a few pieces of silver in my purse."

"Why, Fräulein, you owe me nothing; I am even in debt to you for this very crown." Which proved that Bauer had had his lesson in courtiership.

The assistant soon brought forth the girl's restive filly. Max sprang to her aid. How light her foot was in his palm! (She could easily have mounted alone, such was her skill; but there's the woman of it.)

"I am going toward the Pass," she said, reading the half-veiled appeal in his blue eyes.

"Which way is that?" he asked, swinging into his own saddle.

"That way," nodding toward the south. After all, there could be no harm; in two or three hours their paths would separate for ever.

"Why,"—delightedly,—“I am going that way myself."

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Old Bauer watched them till they disappeared around a turn in the road. He returned to his forge, shaking his head as if confronted by a problem too abstruse even for his German mind.

"Well, he's an American, so I will not waste any pity on him. The pity is that she must wed old Red-nose."

It would have been if she had!

So the Princess and Prince Charming rode into the country, and they talked about a thousand and one things. Had she ever been to France? Yes. To England? She had received part of her education there. Did she know the Princess Hildegarde? Slightly. What was she like? She was a madcap, irresponsible, but very much abused. Did she know Mr. Warrington, the American consul? She had seen him on his morning rides. Wasn't it a fine world? It was, indeed.

Once they stopped at a farm. The girl refused to dismount, bidding Max go in and ask for a drink of milk. Max obeyed with alacrity, returning with two foaming goblets of warm milk.

From time to time the princess stifled the "small voice." It was wrong, and yet it wasn't. What worried her was the thought that Betty might take

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it into her head to follow, and then everything would be spoiled. Every now and then she turned her head and sighed contentedly; the road to rearward was always clear.

"Follow me!" she cried suddenly, even daringly.

A stone wall, three feet high, ran along at their right. The foreground was hard and firm. Pressing the reins on the filly's withers, she made straight for the wall, cleared it, and drew up on the other side. Now, Max hadn't the least idea that the horse under him was a hunter, so I might very well say that he took his life in his hands as he followed her. But Dandy knew his business. He took the wall without effort. A warm glow went over Max when he found that he hadn't broken his neck. Together they galloped down the field and came back for the return jump. This, too, was made easily. Max's admiration knew no bounds. It was a dangerous pastime in more ways than one.

At eight o'clock they turned toward home, talking about another thousand and one things.

"It has been a delightful ride," suggested Max, with an eye to the future.

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"I take this road nearly every morning," said she, looking out upon the water, which was ruffling itself and quarreling along the sandy shores.

Max said nothing, but he at once made up his mind that he would take the same road, provided he could in any reasonable manner get rid of me.

"Did you enjoy the ride?" asked the Honorable Betty, as her Highness came in to breakfast. There were no formalities in the princess' apartments.

"Beautifully!" Her Highness guiltily wondered if there was any logical way to keep Betty in the house for the next few mornings. She sat down and sipped her tea. "The duke talked to me last night. Steinbock played double."

"What!"

"Yes. He sold us to the duke, who patiently waited for me to speak. Betty, I am a fool. But I shall never marry Doppelkinn. That is settled."

"I suppose he will be inviting me to return to England," said Betty shrewdly.

"Not for the present."

"And I have just grown to love the place,"—pathetically. "Mr. Warrington has asked me to

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ride with him afternoons. His ankle prevents him from taking the long morning jaunts. If it will not interfere with your plans, dear —”

“Accept, by all means,” interrupted her Highness. “He is a capital horseman.” She smiled mysteriously. Happily her companion was absorbed in thought and did not see this smile.

Max came in at quarter of ten, went to tub, and came down in time for the eggs.

“Have a good ride?” I asked.

“Bully! Beautiful country!” He was enthusiastic.

“How these healthy animals eat!” I thought as I observed him occasionally.

“Wish I could go with you,” I said, but half-heartedly.

“I’ll get the lay of the land quick enough,” he replied.

The rascal! Not a word about the girl that morning, or the next, or until Thursday morning. If only I had known! But Fate knows her business better than I do, and she was handling the affair. But long rides of a morning with a pretty girl are not safe for any bachelor.

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Thursday morning he came in late. He dropped something on the table. On inspection I found it to be a woman's handkerchief purse.

"Where the deuce did you get that?" I asked, mighty curious.

"By George! but I've been enjoying the most enchanting adventure; such as you read out of a book. I'm inclined to believe that I shall enjoy my studies in old Barscheit."

"But where did you get this?" If there was a girl around, I wanted to know all about it.

"She dropped it."

"*She* dropped it!" I repeated. "What she? Why, you old tow-head, have you been flirting at this hour of the morning?"

"Handsome as a picture!"

"Ha! the ideal at last,"—ironically. "Blonde, of course."

"Dark as a Spaniard, and rides like Diana." His enthusiasm was not to be lightly passed over.

"Never heard of Diana riding," said I; "always saw her pictured as going afoot."

"Don't be an ass! You know very well what I mean."

"I've no argument to offer, nor any picture to

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prove my case. You've had an adventure; give it up, every bit of it."

"One of the finest horsewomen I ever saw. Took a wall three feet high the other morning, just to see if I dared follow. Lucky Dandy is a hunter, or I'd have broken my neck."

"Very interesting." Then of a sudden a thought flashed through my head and out again. "Anybody with her?"

"Only myself these three mornings."

"H'm! Did you get as far as names?"

"Yes; I told her mine. Who is Hildegarde von Heideloff?"

"Heideloff?" I was puzzled. My suspicions evaporated. "I can't say that I know any one by that name. Sure it was Heideloff?"

"Do you mean to tell me," with blank astonishment, "that there is a petticoat on horseback in this duchy that you do not know?"

"I don't know any woman by the name of Hildegarde von Heideloff; on my word of honor, Max, I don't."

"Old Bauer, the blacksmith, knew her."

Bauer? All my suspicions returned. "Describe the girl to me."

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“ Handsome figure, masses of black hair, great black eyes that are full of good fun, a delicate nose, and I might add, a very kissable mouth.”

“ What! have you kissed her? ” I exclaimed.

“ No, no! Only, I’d like to.”

“ H’m! You’ve made quite a study. She must be visiting some one near-by. There is an old castle three miles west of the smithy. Did she speak English? ”

“ Yes,”—excitedly.

“ That accounts for it. An old English nobleman lives over there during the summer months, and it is not improbable that she is one of his guests.” In my heart I knew that her Highness was up to some of her tricks again, but there was no need of her shattering good old Max’s heart. Yet I felt bound to say: “ Why not look into the purse? There might be something there to prove her identity.”

“ Look into her purse? ”—horrified. “ You wouldn’t have me peeping into a woman’s purse, would you? Suppose there should be a box of rouge? Her cheeks were red.”

“ Quite likely.”

“ Or a powder-puff.”

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"Even more likely."

"Or—"

"Go on."

"Or a love letter."

"I have my doubts," said I.

"Well, if you do not know who she is, I'll find out,"—undismayed.

Doubtless he would; he was a persistent old beggar, was Max.

"Do not let it get serious, my boy," I warned.

"You could not marry any one in this country."

"Why not?"

"Have you been regularly baptized? Was your father? Was your grandfather? Unless you can answer these simplest of questions and prove them, you could not get a license; and no priest or preacher would dare marry you without a license."

"Hang you, who's talking about getting married? All I want to know is, who is Hildegarde von Heideloff, and how am I to return her purse? I shall ask the blacksmith."

"Do so,"—taking up my egg-spoon.

Max slipped the purse into his breast-pocket and sat down.

VII

“The one fault I have to find with European life is the poor quality of tobacco used.”

It was eight o'clock, Thursday night, the night of the dinner at Müller's. I was dressing when Max entered, with a miserable cheroot between his teeth.

“They say,” he went on, “that in Russia they drink the finest tea in the world, simply because it is brought overland and not by sea. Unfortunately, tobacco—we Americans recognize no leaf as tobacco unless it comes from Cuba—has to cross the sea, and is, in some unaccountable manner, weakened in the transit. There are worse cigars in Germany than in France, and I wouldn't have believed it possible, if I had not gone to the trouble of proving it. Fine country! For a week I've been trying to smoke the German quality of the weed, as a preventive, but I see I must give it up on account of my throat. My boy, I have news for you,”—tossing the cheroot into the grate.

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"Fire away," said I, struggling with a collar.

"I have a box of Havanas over at the custom house that I forgot to bail out."

"No!" said I joyfully. A Havana, and one of Scharfenstein's!

"I've an idea that they would go well with the dinner. So, if you don't mind, I'll trot over and get 'em."

"Be sure and get around to Müller at half-past eight, then," said I.

"I'll be there." He knew where to find the place.

Müller's Rathskeller was the rendezvous of students, officers and all those persons of quality who liked music with their meat. The place was low-ceilinged, but roomy, and the ventilation was excellent, considering. The smoke never got so thick that one couldn't see the way to the door when the students started in to "clean up the place," to use the happy idiom of mine own country. There were marble tables and floors and arches and light, cane-bottomed chairs from Kohn's. It was at once Bohemian and cosmopolitan, and, once inside, it was easy to imagine oneself in Vienna. A Hungarian orchestra occupied an inclosed plat-

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form, and every night the wail of the violin and the pom-pom of the wool-tipped hammers on the Hungarian "piano" might be heard.

It was essentially a man's place of entertainment; few women ever had the courage or the inclination to enter. In America it would have been the fashion; but in the capital of Barscheit the women ate in the restaurant above, which was attached to the hotel, and depended upon the Volksgarten band for their evening's diversion.

You had to order your table hours ahead—that is, if you were a civilian. If you were lucky enough to be an officer, you were privileged to take any vacant chair you saw. But Heaven aid you if you attempted to do this not being an officer! In Barscheit there were also many unwritten laws, and you were obliged to observe these with all the fidelity and attention that you gave to the enameled signs. Only the military had the right to request the orchestra to repeat a piece of music. Sometimes the lieutenants, seized with that gay humor known only to cubs, would force the orchestra in Müller's to play the Hungarian war-song till the ears cried out in pain. This was always the case when any Austrians happened to be pres-

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ent. But ordinarily the crowds were good-natured, boisterous, but orderly.

It was here, then, that I had arranged to give my little dinner. The orchestra had agreed—for a liberal tip—to play *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and there was a case of Doppelkinn's sparkling Moselle. I may as well state right here that we neither heard our national anthem nor drank the vintage. You will soon learn why. I can laugh now, I can treat the whole affair with becoming levity, but at the time I gained several extra grey hairs.

If the princess hadn't turned around, and if Max hadn't wanted that box of Havanas!

When I arrived at Müller's I found my boys in a merry mood. They were singing softly from *Robin Hood* with fine college harmony, and as I entered they swarmed about me like so many young dogs. Truth to tell, none of them was under twenty, and two or three were older than myself. But to them I represented official protection for whatever they might do. I assumed all the dignity I dared. I had kept Scharfenstein's name back as a surprise.

Ellis—for whom I had the passports—immedi-

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ately struck me as being so nearly like Max that they might easily have been brothers. Ellis was slighter; that was all the difference. I gave him his papers and examined his tickets. All was well; barring accidents, he would be in Dresden the next day.

"You go through Doppelkinn, then?" said I.

"Yes. I have friends in Dresden whom I wish to see before going home."

"Well, good luck to you!"

Then I announced that Max Scharfenstein, an old college comrade, would join us presently. This was greeted with hurrahs. At that time there wasn't an American student who did not recollect Max's great run from the ten-yard line. (But where the deuce *was* Max?) I took a little flag from my pocket and stuck it into the vase of poppies, and the boys clapped their hands. You never realize how beautiful your flag is till you see it in a foreign land. I apologized for Max's absence, explaining the cause, and ordered dinner to be served. We hadn't much time, as Ellis's train departed at ten. It was now a quarter to nine.

We had come to the relishes when a party of four officers took the table nearest us. They hung

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up their sabers on the wall-pegs, and sat down, ordering a bottle of light wine. Usually there were five chairs to the table, but even if only two were being used no one had the right to withdraw one of the vacant chairs without the most elaborate apologies. This is the law of courtesy in Barscheit. In America it is different; if you see anything you want, take it.

Presently one of the officers—I knew none of them save by sight—rose and approached. He touched the flag insolently and inquired what right it had in a public restaurant in Barscheit. Ordinarily his question would not have been put without some justification. But he knew very well who I was and what my rights were in this instance.

“Herr Lieutenant,” said I coldly, though my cheeks were warm enough, “I represent that flag in this country, and I am accredited with certain privileges, as doubtless you are aware. You will do me the courtesy of returning to your own table.” I bowed.

He glared at me for a brief period, then turned on his heel. This was the first act in the play. At the fellow’s table sat Lieutenant von Störer,

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Doppelkinn's nephew and heir-presumptive. He was, to speak plainly, a rake, a spendthrift and wholly untrustworthy. He was not ill-looking, however.

My spirits floated between anger and the fear that the officers might ruin the dinner—which they eventually did.

Things went on smoothly for a time. The orchestra was pom-pomming the popular airs from *Faust*. (Where the deuce was that tow-headed Dutchman?) Laughter rose and fell; the clinkle of glass was heard; voices called. And then Max came in, looking as cool as you please, though I could read by his heaving chest that he had been sprinting up back streets. The boys crowded around him, and there was much ado over the lag-gard.

Unfortunately the waiter had forgotten to bring a chair for his plate. With a genial smile on his face, Max innocently stepped over to the officers' table and plucked forth the vacant chair. For a wonder the officers appeared to give this action no heed, and I was secretly gratified. It was something to be a consul, after all. But I counted my chickens too early.

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"Where are the cigars?" I asked as Max sat down complacently.

"Cigars?"—blankly. "Hang me, I've clean forgotten them!" And then, oblivious of the probable storm that was at that moment gathering for a downpour over his luckless head, he told us the reason of his delay.

"There was a crowd around the palace," he began. "It seems that the Princess Hildegarde has run away, and they believe that she has ridden toward the Pass in a closed carriage. The police are at this very moment scouring the country in that direction. She has eloped."

"Eloped?" we all cried, being more or less familiar with the state of affairs at the palace.

"Good-by to Doppelkinn's *Frau!*"

"Good girl!"

"She has been missing since seven o'clock, when she drove away on the pretense of visiting her father's old steward, who is ill," went on Max, feeling the importance of his news. "They traced her there. From the steward's the carriage was driven south, and that's the last seen of her. There won't be any wedding at the cathedral next Tuesday,"—laughing.

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Queries and answers were going crisscross over the table, when I observed with dread that Lieutenant von Störer had risen and was coming our way. He stopped at Max's side. Max looked up to receive Von Störer's glove full on the cheek. It was no gentle stroke. Von Störer at once returned to his table and sat down.

For a moment we were all absolutely without power of motion or of speech, Max's face grew as white as the table-cloth, and the print of the glove glowed red against the white. I was horrified, for I knew his tremendous strength. If he showed fight, Von Störer would calmly saber him. It was the custom. But Max surprised me. He was the coolest among us, but of that quality of coolness which did not reassure me. He took up his story where he had left off and finished it. For his remarkable control I could have taken him in my arms and hugged him.

The officers scowled, while Von Störer bit his mustache nervously. The American had ignored his insult. Presently he rose again and approached. He thrust a card under Max's nose.

"Can you understand that?" he asked contemptuously.

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Max took the card, ripped it into quarters and dropped these to the floor. Then, to my terror and the terror of those with me, he tranquilly pulled out a murderous-looking Colt and laid it beside his plate. He went on talking, but none of us heard a word he said. We were fearfully waiting to see him kill some one or be killed.

No one was killed. The officers hurriedly took down their sabers and made a bee-line for the door of which I have spoken.

Max returned the revolver to his hip-pocket and gave vent to an Homeric laugh.

"You tow-headed Dutchman!" I cried, when I found voice for my words, "what have you done?"

"Done? Why, it looks as if we had all the downs this half," he replied smartly. "Oh, the gun isn't loaded,"—confidentially.

Ellis fumbled in his pockets and produced his passports and tickets. These he shoved over to Max.

"What's this for?" Max asked curiously.

"Ellis," said I, "it is very good of you. Max, take those. Mr. Ellis wishes to save your hide. Take them and get to the station as quickly as you can. And for the love of mercy, do not turn

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around till you're over in Doppelkinn's vineyards."

"Well, I'm hanged if I understand!" he cried. "I'm a peaceful man. A beggar walks up to me and slaps me in the face for nothing at all, and now I must hike, eh? What the devil have I done now?"

Then, as briefly as I could, I explained the enormity of his offenses. To take a chair from a table, as he had done, was a gross insult; to receive a slap in the face and not to resent it, was another insult; to tear up an opponent's visiting-card, still another; to take out a revolver in Barscheit, unless you were an officer or had a permit, was worse than an insult; it was a crime, punishable by long imprisonment. They could accuse him of being either an anarchist or a socialist-red, coming to Barscheit with the intent to kill the grand duke. The fact that he was ignorant of the laws, or that he was an alien, would remit not one particle of his punishment and fine; and weeks would pass ere the matter could be arranged between the United States and Barscheit.

"Good Lord!" he gasped; "why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't you tell me that you carried a

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cannon in your pocket? Take Ellis' papers, otherwise you stand pat for a heap of trouble, and I can't help you. Go straight to Dresden, telegraph me, and I'll forward your luggage."

"But I came here to study!" Max argued.

"It will be geology in the form of prison walls," said Ellis quietly. "Don't be foolish, Mr. Scharfenstein; it is not a matter of a man's courage, but of his common sense. Take the tickets and light out. I have lived here for three years, and have seen men killed outright for less than you have done."

"But you don't expect me to leave this place without punching that beggar's head?"—indignantly. "What do you think I'm made of?"

"You'll never get the chance to punch his head," said I. "We are wasting valuable time. Those officers have gone for the police. You have about twenty minutes to make the train. Come, for heaven's sake, come!"

He finally got it into his head that we knew what we were talking about. How we got him to the station I do not remember, but somehow we got him there. He sputtered and fumed and

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swore, as all brave men will who feel that they are running away in a cowardly fashion. He wasn't convinced, but he thanked Ellis for his kindness and hoped that *he* wouldn't get into trouble on his (Max's) account.

"Go straight to Dresden; say you've been studying medicine in Barscheit for three years; refer to me by telegraph if there is any question as to your new identity," said I. "You're the only man in the world, Max, that I'd lie for."

He stumbled through the gates, and we saw him open the door of a carriage just as the train began to pull out. A guard tried to stop him, but he was not quite quick enough. We watched the train till it melted away into the blackness beyond the terminus covering; then we, I and my fellow diners, went soberly into the street. Here was a howdy-do! Suddenly Ellis let out a sounding laugh, and, scarcely knowing why, we joined him. It *was* funny, very funny, for every one but poor old Max! The American spirit is based on the sense of humor, and even in tragic moments is irrepressible.

We did not return to Müller's; each of us stole quietly home to await the advent of the police, for

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they would rout out every American in town in their search for the man with the gun. They would first visit the consulate and ascertain what I knew of the affair; when they got through with the rest of the boys Max would be in Doppelkinn. The police were going to be very busy that night: a princess on one hand and an anarchist on the other.

There were terrible times, too, in the palace. Long before we watched Max's train and the vanishing green and red lights at the end of it the grand duke was having troubles of his own. He was pacing wildly up and down in his dressing-room. Clutched in his fist was a crumpled sheet of paper. From time to time he smoothed it out and re-read the contents. Each time he swore like the celebrated man in Flanders.

You forced me and I warned you that I would do something desperate. Do not send for me, for you will never find me till you come to your senses. I have eloped.

Hildegarde.





VIII

Shortly before six o'clock — dinner in the palace was rarely served until half-after eight — the Honorable Betty sat down to her writing-desk in her boudoir, which opened directly into that belonging to the princess, to write a few letters home. A dinner was to be given to the state officials that night, and she knew from experience that after that solemn event was concluded it would be too late for the departing mails. She seemed to have no difficulty in composing her thoughts and transferring them to paper. There were times when she would lean back, nibble the end of her pen and smile in a dreamy, retrospective fashion. No doubt her thoughts were pleasant and agreeable.

She had completed addressing three envelopes, when she heard the door leading into the princess' boudoir open and close. She turned to behold the princess herself.

“Why, Gretchen, where are you going?”—

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noting the grey walking-dress, the grey hat, the sensible square-toed shoes.

"I am going to visit a sick nurse," replied her Highness, avoiding the other's eye.

"But shall you have time to dress for dinner?"

"That depends. Besides, the official dinners are a great bore." Her Highness came forward, caught the dark head of the English girl between her gloved hands, pressed it against her heart, bent and kissed it. "What a lovely girl you are, Betty! always unruffled, always even-tempered. You will grow old very gracefully."

"I hope so; but I do not want to grow old at all. Can't I go with you?"—eagerly.

"Impossible; etiquette demands your presence here to-night. If I am late my rank and my errand will be my excuse. What jolly times we used to have in that quaint old boarding-school in St. John's Wood! Do you remember how we went to your noble father's country place one Christmas? I went *incognita*. There was a children's party, and two boys had a fisticuff over you. Nobody noticed me those days. I was happy then." The princess frowned. It might have

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been the sign of repression of tears. Betty, with her head against the other's bosom, could not see. "I shall be lonely without you; for you can not stay on here for ever. If you could, it would be different. I shall miss you. Somehow you possess the faculty of calming me. I am so easily stirred into a passion; my temper is so surface-wise. Some day, however, I shall come to England and spend a whole month with you. Will not that be fine?"

"How melancholy your voice is!" cried Betty, trying without avail to remove her Highness' hands.

"No, no; I want to hold you just so. Perhaps I am sentimental to-night. I have all the moods, agreeable and disagreeable. . . . Do you love anybody?"

"Love anybody? What do you mean?"—rising in spite of the protesting hands. "Do I look as if I were in love with anybody?"

They searched each other's eyes.

"Oh, you islanders! Nobody can fathom what is going on in your hearts. You never make any mistakes; you always seem to know which paths to pursue; you are always right, always, always. I'd

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like to see you commit a folly, Betty; it's a wicked wish, I know, but I honestly wish it. There is certainly more Spanish blood in my veins than German. I am always making mistakes; I never know which path is the right one; I am always wrong. Do you believe it possible for a woman of birth and breeding to fall in love with a man whom she has known only three days?"

"Three days! Are you crazy, Hildegarde?"

"Call me Gretchen!"—imperiously.

"Gretchen, what has come over you?"

"I asked you a question."

"Well,"—a bit of color stealing into her cheeks,—“it is possible, but very foolish. One ought to know something of a man's character,” went on Betty, “before permitting sentiment to enter into one's thoughts.”

“That is my own opinion, wise little white owl.” Her Highness took her friend in her arms and kissed her, held her at arm's length, drew her to her heart and again kissed her. It was like a farewell. Then she let her go. “If there is anything you need, make yourself at home with my cases.” And her Highness was gone.

Betty gazed at the door through which dear

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Gretchen had pased, gazed thoughtfully and anxiously.

“How oddly she acted! I wonder—” She made as though to run to the door, but stopped, as if ashamed of the doubt which flashed into her mind and out again.

The little clock on the mantel chimed forth the seventh hour, and she rang for her maid. It was time that she began dressing.

(Thus, for the present, I shall leave her. There are several reasons why my imagination should take this step; for, what should I know of a woman’s toilet, save in the general mysterious results? However, I feel at liberty to steal into the duke’s dressing-room. Here, while I am not positive what happened, at least I can easily bring my imagination to bear upon the picture.)

The duke was rather pleased with himself. He liked to put on his state uniform, with its blue-grey frock, the white doeskin trousers which strapped under the patent-leather boots, the gold braid, the silver saber and the little rope of medals strung across his full, broad breast. It was thus he created awe; it was thus he became truly the sovereign, urbane and majestic.

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His valet was buckling on the saber belt, when there came a respectful tap on the door.

"Enter," said the duke, frowning. One can not assert any particular degree of dignity with a valet at one's side.

But it was only a corridor attendant who entered. He approached the duke's valet and presented a letter.

"For his serene Highness." He bowed and backed out, closing the door gently.

At once the valet bowed also and extended the letter to his master. Formality is a fine thing in a palace.

"Ah, a letter," mused the duke, profoundly innocent of the viper which was about to sting him. "My glasses, Gustav; my eye-glasses!"

The valet hurried to the dresser and returned with the duke's state eye-glasses. These the duke perched deliberately upon the end of his noble nose. He opened the letter and read its contents. The valet, watching him slyly, saw him grow pale, then red, and finally purple,—wrath has its rainbow. His hands shook, the glasses slipped from his palpitating nose. And I grieve to relate that his

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serene Highness swore something marvelous to hear.

“Damnation!” he said, or some such word. “The little fool!” Then, suddenly remembering his dignity and the phrase that no man is a hero to his valet, he pointed to his glasses, at the same time returning the letter to its envelope, this letter which had caused this momentary perturbation. “Call the minister of police. You will find him in the smoking-room off the conservatory. Make all haste!”

The valet flew out of the door, while the duke began pacing up and down the room, muttering and growling, and balling his fists, and jingling his shining medals. He kicked over an inoffensive hassock and his favorite hound, and I don’t know how many long-winded German oaths he let go. (It’s a mighty hard language to swear in, especially when a man’s under high pressure.)

“The silly little fool! And on a night like this! Curse it! This is what comes of mixing Spanish blood with German, of letting her aunt’s wishes overrule mine in the matter of education. But she shall be brought back, even if I have to ask the assistance of every sovereign in Europe. This is

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the end. And I had planned such a pleasant evening at cards!" The duke was not wholly unselfish.

In less than ten minutes' time the valet returned with the minister of police. The duke immediately dismissed the valet.

"Your serene Highness sent for me?" asked the minister, shaking in his boots. There had been four ministers of police in three years.

"Yes. Read this."

The minister took the letter. He read it with bulging eyes. "Good heavens, it must be one of her Highness' jokes!"

"It will be a sorry joke for you if she crosses any of the frontiers."

"But—"

"But!" roared the duke. "Don't you dare bring up that word scandal! Seek her. Turn everybody out,—the army, the police, everybody. When you locate her, telegraph, and have a special engine awaiting me at the station. And if you play a poor game of cards to-night I'll take away your portfolio. Remember, if she passes the frontier, off goes your official head!"

"And the fellow, who is he?"

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"The good Lord only knows! That girl!
. . . Witness these grey hairs. Put the
rascal in irons; I'll attend to his case when I ar-
rive. . . . Where is Steinbock?"

"He was arrested this morning in Berlin; I
have already applied for his extradition."

"Good! Now, be off with you! Leave no
stone unturned. The expense is nothing; I will
gladly pay it out of my private purse."

"I'll find her," said the minister grimly. His
portfolio hung in the balance.

All at once the duke struck his hands together
jubilantly.

"What is it?" asked the minister. "A clue?"

"Nothing, nothing! Be gone; you are wasting
time."

The minister of police dashed out of the room as
if pursued by a thousand devils. He knew the
duke's mood; it was not one to cross or irritate.
No sooner was he gone than the duke left his
apartments and sought those of his niece. It
might be a joke; it would do no harm to find out
positively. But the beautiful suite was empty;
even her Highness' maid was gone. He then

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knocked on the door which led into Betty's boudoir, not very gently either.

"Open!" he bellowed.

"Who is it?" demanded a maid's frightened voice.

"The duke! Open instantly!"

"It is quite impossible," said another voice from within. It was calm and firm. "I am dressing."

"I must see you this instant. Open or I shall force the door!"

"Is your serene Highness mad?"

"Will you open this door?"

"You command it?"

"A hundred times, yes!"

"Since you command it." The voice was no longer calm; it was sharp and angry.

The wait seemed an hour to his serene Highness, serene no longer. At length the bolt slipped, and the irate duke shouldered his way in. The tableau which met his gaze embarrassed him for a space. He was even ashamed. The Honorable Betty stood behind a tall-backed chair, an opera cloak thrown hastily over her bare shoulders. Her hair was partly down. A beautiful woman in a rage is

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a fascinating sight. The duke stared at her irresolutely.

"Will your Highness explain this extraordinary intrusion?" she demanded. "You have literally forced your way into my room while I am dressing. It is utterly outside my understanding."

"I am old enough to be your father."

"That is the weakest excuse you could give me. At your age one's blood ought to be cooled to a certain discretion. My father, if he had had anything important to say, would have remained on the other side of the door. I am not deaf. Your explanation is in order."

The duke had never been talked to so plainly in all his life. For a while he was without voice, but had plenty of color. "It is easily explained," he finally bawled out to her. "Her Highness has eloped!"

The girl stared at him with wide eyes. "Eloped?" she breathed faintly.

"Yes, eloped."

Betty wondered if she heard aright, or if the duke were out of his mind; and then she recollected her conversation with the princess. Her mouth opened as if to speak, but instead she closed her

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lips tightly. That wilful girl; whatever would become of her!

"Give this letter to your mistress," said the duke to the maid. "I will station myself in the window while she reads it."

He strode over to the window and drew the curtains about him. Below, the night crowds were wandering about the streets; the band was playing in the Volksgarten; carriages were rolling to and from the opera; the fountain in the center of the square sparkled merrily in the glare of the arc lights. But the duke saw none of these things. Rather he saw the telegraphic despatches flying to the four ends of the globe, telling the peoples that he, the Grand Duke of Barscheit, had been outwitted by a girl; that the Princess Hildegard had eloped with a man who was not the chosen one. In other words, he saw himself laughed at from one end of the continent to the other. (There is something very funny in domestic troubles when they occur in another man's family!) No, the duke saw not the beauty of the night; instead of stars he saw asterisks, that abominable astronomy of the lampoonists. He had never doubted the girl's courage; but to elope! . . . And *who* the

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devil had eloped with her? He knew the girl's natural pride; whoever the fellow might be, he could be no less than a gentleman. But who, who?

"Your Highness?" called a quiet (I might say deceptive) voice.

The duke came forth.

"Your Highness will do me the honor to make out my passports to-night. I desire to leave the palace immediately. The affront you have put upon me, even under the circumstances, is wholly unpardonable. You imply that I have had something to do with her Highness' act. You will excuse me to her serene Highness, whom I love and respect. My dignity demands that I leave at once."

A flicker—but only a flicker—of admiration lighted the duke's eyes. It was a plucky little baggage.

"I will issue your passports upon one condition," he said.

"And that condition?"—proudly.

"Tell me everything: Where has she gone, and with whom?"

"I know absolutely nothing."

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Silence. The duke gnawed his mustache, while his eyes strove in vain to beat down hers.

"Thank you, I believe you." Then, giving way to his wrath: "You English people, you are all the same! You never understand. I have brought up this girl and surrounded her with every luxury; against my will and reason I have let her become educated in foreign lands; I have given her the utmost freedom; this is how I am repaid."

"You forgot one important thing, your Highness."

"What?"—haughtily.

"Affection. You have never given her that."

The duke felt himself beaten into silence, and this did not add to his amiability.

"Your passports shall be made out immediately; but I beg of you to reconsider your determination, and to remain here as long as you please. For the sake of appearances, I desire your presence at the dinner-table."

"I shall leave as soon as the dinner is over." This girl's mind seemed immovable.

The duke shrugged. There was no use in beating against this wall. "I wish you knew whither she has gone."

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"Frankly, if I knew I should not tell your Highness. My father taught me never to betray a confidence."

"As you will. I beg your pardon for the abruptness of my entrance," he said, choking down his wrath. He could not allow himself to be outdone in the matter of coolness by this chit of an English girl.

"I grant it you."

The duke then retired, or, I should say, retreated. He wandered aimlessly about the palace, waiting for news and making wretched all those with whom he came in contact. The duchess was not feeling well; a wrangle with her was out of the question; besides, he would make himself hoarse. So he waited and waited, and re-read the princess' letter. At dinner he ate nothing; his replies were curt and surly. The Honorable Betty also ate nothing. She sat, wondering if her maid could pack five trunks in two hours.

I had quite a time of it myself that night. As I predicted, I received a visit from the police in regard to Mr. Scharfenstein. I explained the matter the best I knew how, and confessed that

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he had hurriedly left the city for parts unknown. I did not consider it absolutely essential that I should declare that I had seen him enter a railway carriage for Dresden. Besides this, I had to stand sponsor for the other boys and explain at length that they were in no wise concerned with Mr. Scharfenstein's great offense. The police were courteous and deferential, admitting that Max was the culprit. He had drawn a revolver in a public restaurant; he had broken a grave law. The inspector wrote a dozen telegrams and despatched them from the consulate. I had, at his request, offered him the blanks.

At eleven I received a telephone call from the Continental Hotel. It was a woman's voice, and my heart beat violently as I recognized it. I was requested to come at once to the hotel. I should find her in the ladies' salon. I walked the distance in ten minutes. She told me all that had happened.

"By this time it is all over the city. But it is all nonsense about her Highness' eloping with any one. She is too nobly born to commit such a folly. She has simply run away; and I very much fear that she will be caught. The duke is in a terrible

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temper. I could not remain in the palace, for the duke suspects that I know where she has gone. I have my passports. The British consul is away hunting. You were the only English-speaking person to whom I could come for aid."

"I am very glad."

"Will it be asking too much of you to aid me in leaving Barscheit to-night? There is a train at one o'clock for Dresden."

"Leave Barscheit?" My heart sank dismally.

"Oh,"—with a smile,—“the world is small and England is even smaller."

"I shall have to give up the consulate,"—gravely.

She laughed. "I shall be in England for something more than a year. Truthfully, I hunger for mine own people. You know what that hunger is."

"Yes. I shall go home as often as possible now. I always stop a few days in London."

"Then I shall expect to see you; perhaps during the holidays. I am determined to leave Barscheit before the duke changes his mind. Heavens, he may put me in prison!"

"I doubt that."

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I saw to it that she secured a sleeping-compartment all to herself, took charge of her luggage and carefully examined her papers. Then we had a small supper. I wanted to ask a thousand questions, but my courage lacked the proper key.

"May I have the pleasure of writing to you occasionally?" I finally ventured. "I am sure that you would like a bit of Barscheit gossip from time to time."

"Write to me, by all means. I shall await these letters with great pleasure."

"And answer them?"—growing bolder.

"It is easily seen that you are a diplomat. Yes, I shall answer them. Heigh-ho! I shall miss my rides." What a brave little woman she was!

Finally we started for the station, and I saw her to the gates. We shook hands, and I was sure I felt a very friendly pressure; and then she disappeared. There was altogether a different feeling in my heart as I watched *her* train draw out. Eh, well, the world is small and England is smaller, even as she had said. It's a mighty fine world, when you get the proper angle of vision.

IX

There was very little light in the compartment into which Max had so successfully dived. Some one had turned down the wicks of the oil lamps which hung suspended between the luggage-racks above, and the gloom was notable rather than subdued. So far as he was concerned he was perfectly contented; his security was all the greater. He pressed his face against the window and peered out. The lights of the city flashed by, and finally grew few and far between, and then came the blackness of the country. It would take an hour and a half to cross the frontier, and there would be no stop this side, for which he was grateful. He swore, mumbling. To have come all this way to study, and then to leg it in this ignominious fashion! It was downright scandalous! Whoever heard of such laws? Of course he had been rather silly in pulling his gun, for even in the United States — where he devoutly wished himself at that moment — it was a misdemeanor to carry concealed

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weapons. He felt of his cheek. He would return some day, and if it was the last thing he ever did, he would slash that lieutenant's cheeks. The insolent beggar! To be struck and not to strike back! He choked.

Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and he cast about.

"The deuce!" he muttered.

He was not alone. Huddled in the far corner was a woman heavily veiled. Young or old, he could not tell. She sat motionless, and appeared to be looking out of the opposite window. Well, so long as she did not bother him he would not bother her. But he would much rather have been alone.

He took out his passport and tried to read it. It was impossible. So he rose, steadied himself, and turned up the wick of one of the lamps.

He did not hear the muffled exclamation which came from the other end.

He dropped back upon the cushion and began to read. So he was George Ellis, an American student in good standing; he was aged twenty-nine, had blue eyes, light hair, was six feet tall, and weighed one hundred and fifty-four pounds.

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Ha! he had, then, lost thirty pounds in as many minutes? At this rate he wouldn't cast a shadow when he struck Dresden. He had studied three years at the college; but what the deuce had he studied? If they were only asleep at the frontier! He returned the document to his pocket, and as he did so his fingers came into contact with the purse he had picked up in the road that morning — Hildegarde von Heideloff. What meant Fate in crossing *her* path with his? He had been perfectly contented in mind and heart before that first morning ride; and here he was, sighing like a furnace. She had been merely pretty on Monday, on Tuesday she had been handsome, on Wednesday she had been adorable; now she was the most beautiful woman that ever lived. (Ah, the progressive adjective, that litany of love!) Alas! it was quite evident that she had passed out of his life as suddenly and mysteriously as she had entered it. He would keep the purse as a souvenir, and some day, when he was an old man, he would open it.

There is something compelling in the human eye, a magnetism upon which Science has yet to put her cold and unromantic finger. Have you never experienced the sensation that some was look-

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ing at you? Doubtless you have. Well, Max presently turned his glance toward his silent fellow traveler. She had lifted her veil and was staring at him with wondering, fearing eyes. These eyes were somewhat red, as if the little bees of grief had stung them.

"You!" he cried, the blood thumping into his throat. He tossed his hat to the floor and started for her end of the compartment.

She held up a hand as if to ward off his approach. "I can hear perfectly," she said; "it is not needful that you should come any nearer."

He sat down confused. He could not remember when his heart had beaten so irregularly.

"May I ask how you came to enter this compartment?" she asked coldly.

"I jumped in,"—simply. What was to account for this strange attitude?

"So I observe. What I meant was, by what right?"

"It happened to be the only door at hand, and I was in a great hurry." Where was his usual collectedness of thought? He was embarrassed and angry at the knowledge.

"Did you follow me?" Her nostrils were pal-

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pitating and the corners of her mouth were drawn aggressively.

"Follow you?" amazed that such an idea should enter into her head. "Why, you are the last person I ever expected to see again. Indeed, you are only a fairy-story; there is, I find, no such person as Hildegarde von Heideloff." Clearly he was recovering.

"I know it,"—candidly. "It was my mother's name, and I saw fit to use it." She really hoped he *hadn't* followed her.

"You had no need to use it, or any name, for that matter. When I gave you my name it was given in good faith. The act did not imply that I desired to know yours."

"But you did!"—imperiously.

"Yes. Curiosity is the brain of our mental anatomy." When Max began to utter tall phrases it was a sign of even-balanced mentality.

"And if I hadn't told you my name, you would have asked for it."

"Not the first day."

"Well, you would have on Tuesday."

"Not a bit of a doubt." He certainly wouldn't show her how much he cared. (What was she do-

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ing in this carriage? She had said nothing that morning about traveling.)

"Well, you will admit that under the circumstances I had the right to give any name it pleased me to give."

He came over to her end and sat down. Her protests (half-hearted) he ignored.

"I can not see very well from over there," he explained.

"It is not necessary that you should see; you can hear what I have to say."

"Very well; I'll go back." And he did. He made a fine pretense of looking out of the window. Why should this girl cross his path at this unhappy moment?

There was a pause.

"You are not near so nice as you were this morning," she said presently.

"I can't be nice and sit away over here."

"What made you jump into this compartment, of all others?"

"I wasn't particular what compartment I got into so long as I got into one. As I said, I was in a hurry."

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"You said nothing this morning about going away from Barscheit."

"Neither did you."

Another pause. (I take it, from the character of this dialogue, that their morning rides must have been rather interesting.)

"You told me that you were in Barscheit to study nerves,"—wickedly.

"So thought I, up to half-past nine to-night; but it appears that I am not,"—gloomily.

"You are running away, too?"—with suppressed eagerness.

"Running away, too!" he repeated. "Are *you* running away?"

"As fast as ever the train can carry me. I am on the way to Dresden."

"Dresden? It seems that Fate is determined that we shall travel together this day. Dresden is my destination also."

"Let me see your passports,"—extending a firm white hand.

He obeyed docilely, as docilely as though he were married. She gave the paper one angry glance and tossed it back.

"George Ellis; so that is your name?"—

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scornfully. "You told me that it was Scharfenstein. I did not ask you to tell me your name; you took that service upon yourself." She recalled the duke's declaration that he should have her every movement watched. If this American was watching her, the duke was vastly more astute than she had given him the credit for being. "Are you in the pay of the duke? Come, confess that you have followed me, that you have been watching me for these four days." How bitter the cup of romance tasted to her now! She had been deceived. "Well, you shall never take me from this train save by force. I *will* not go back!"

"I haven't the slightest idea of what you are talking about," he said, mightily discouraged. "I never saw this country till Monday, and never want to see it again."

"From what are you running away then?"—skeptically.

"I am running away from a man who slapped me in the face,"—bitterly; and all his wrongs returned to him.

"Indeed!"—derisively.

"Yes, I!" He thrust out both his great arms

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miserably. "I'm a healthy-looking individual, am I not, to be running away from anything?"

"Especially after having been a soldier in the Spanish War. Why did you tell me that your name was Scharfenstein?"

"Heaven on earth, it *is* Scharfenstein! I'm simply taking my chance on another man's passports."

"I am unconvinced,"— ungraciously. She was, however, inordinately happy; at the sight of the picture of woe on his face all her trust in him returned. She believed every word he said, but she wanted to know everything.

"Very well; I see that I must tell you everything to get back into your good graces — Fräulein von Heideloff."

"If you *ever* were in my good graces!"

Graphically he recounted the adventure at Müller's. He was a capital story-teller, and he made a very good impression.

"If it hadn't been for the princess' eloping I should not have been here," he concluded, "for my friend would have had a waiter bring me that chair."

"The princess' eloping!"— aghast.

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"Why, yes. It seems that she eloped to-night; so the report came from the palace."

The girl sat tight, as they say; then suddenly she burst into uncontrollable laughter. It was the drollest thing she had ever heard. She saw the duke tearing around the palace, ordering the police hither and thither, sending telegrams, waking his advisers and dragging them from their beds. My! what a hubbub! Suddenly she grew serious.

"Have you the revolver still?"

"Yes."

"Toss it out of the window; quick!"

"But —"

"Do as I say. They will naturally search you at the frontier."

He took out the revolver and gazed regretfully at it, while the girl could not repress a shudder.

"What a horrible-looking thing!"

"I carried it all through the war."

"Throw it away and buy a new one."

"But the associations!"

"They will lock you up as a dangerous person." She let down the window and the cold night air rushed in. "Give it to me." He did so. She

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flung it far into the night. "There, that is better. Some day you will understand."

"I shall never understand anything in this country — What are *you* running away from?"

"A man with a red nose."

"A red nose? Are they so frightful here as all that?"

"This one is. He wants — to marry me."

"Marry you!"

"Yes; rather remarkable that any man should desire me as a wife, isn't it?"

He saw that she was ironical. Having nothing to say, he said nothing, but looked longingly at the vacant space beside her.

She rested her chin upon the sill of the window and gazed at the stars. A wild rush of the wind beat upon her face, bringing a thousand vague heavy perfumes and a pleasant numbing. How cleverly she had eluded the duke's police! What a brilliant idea it had been to use her private carriage key to steal into the carriage compartment long before the train was made up! It had been some trouble to light the lamps, but in doing so she had avoided the possible dutiful guard. He *had* peered in, but, seeing that the lamps were

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lighted, concluded that one of his fellows had been the rounds.

The police would watch all those who entered or left the station, but never would they think to search a carriage into which no one had been seen to enter. But oh, what a frightful predicament she was in! All she possessed in the world was a half-crown, scarce enough for her breakfast. And if she did not find her governess at once she would be lost utterly, and in Dresden! She choked back the sob. Why couldn't they let her be? She didn't want to marry any one — that is, just yet. She didn't want her wings clipped before she had learned what a fine thing it was to fly. She was young.

“ Oh! ”

“ What is it? ” she said, turning.

“ I have something of yours,” answered Max, fumbling in his pocket, grateful for some excuse to break the silence. “ You dropped your purse this morning. Permit me to return it to you. I hadn't the remotest idea how I was going to return it. In truth, I had just made up my mind to keep it as a souvenir.”

She literally snatched it from his extended hand.

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"My purse! My purse! And I thought it was gone for ever!" hugging it hysterically to her heart. She feverishly tried to unlatch the clasps.

"You need not open it," he said quietly, even proudly, "I had not thought of looking into it, even to prove your identity."

"Pardon! I did not think. I was so crazy to see it again." She laid the purse beside her. "You see," with an hysterical catch in her voice, "all the money I had in the world was in that purse, and I was running away without any money, and only Heaven knows what misfortunes were about to befall me. There were, and are, a thousand crowns in the purse."

"A thousand crowns?"

"In bank-notes. Thank you, thank you! I am so happy!"—clasping her hands. Then, with a smile as warm as the summer's sun, she added: "You may—come and sit close beside me. You may even smoke."

Max grew light-headed. This was as near Heaven as he ever expected to get.

"Open your purse and look into it," he said. "I'm a brute; you are dying to do so."

"May I?"—shyly.

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Then it came into Max's mind, with all the brilliancy of a dynamo spark, that this was the one girl in all the world, the ideal he had been searching for; and he wanted to fall at her feet and tell her so.

"Look!" she cried gleefully, holding up the packet of bank-notes.

"I wish," he said boyishly, "that you didn't have any money at all, so I could help you and feel that you depended upon me."

She smiled. How a woman loves this simple kind of flattery! It tells her better what she may wish to know than a thousand hymns sung in praise of her beauty.

But even as he spoke a chill of horror went over Max. He put his hand hurriedly into his vest-pocket. Fool! Ass! How like a man! In changing his clothes at the consulate he had left his money, and all he had with him was some pocket change.

The girl saw his action and read the sequence in the look of dismay which spread over his face.

"You have no money either?" she cried. She separated the packet of notes into two equal parts. "Here!"

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He smiled weakly.

“Take them!”

“No, a thousand times, no! I have a watch, and there’s always a pawnbroker handy, even in Europe.”

“You offered to help me,” she insisted.

“It is not quite the same.”

“Take quarter of it.”

“No. Don’t you understand? I really couldn’t.”

“One, just one, then!” she pleaded.

An idea came to him. “Very well; I will take one.” And when she gave it to him he folded it reverently and put it away.

“I understand!” she cried. “You are just going to keep it; you don’t intend to spend it at all. Don’t be foolish!”

“I shall notify my friend, when we reach Doppelkinn, that I am without funds, and he will telegraph to Dresden.”

“Your friends were very wise in sending you away as they did. Aren’t you always getting into trouble?”

“Yes. But I doubt the wisdom of my friends in sending me away as they did,”—with a frank

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glance into her eyes. How beautiful they were, now that the sparkle of mischief had left them!

She looked away. If only Doppelkinn were young like this! She sighed.

"Can they force one to marry in this country?" he asked abruptly.

"When one is in my circumstances."

He wanted to ask what those circumstances were, but what he said was: "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"You are even more helpless than I am,"—softly. "If you are caught you will be imprisoned. I shall only suffer a temporary loss of liberty; my room will be my dungeon-keep." How big and handsome and strong he looked! What a terrible thing it was to be born in purple! "Tell me about yourself."

His hand strayed absently toward his upper vest-pocket, and then fell to his side. He licked his lips.

"Smoke!" she commanded intuitively. "I said that you might."

"I can talk better when I smoke," he advanced rather lamely. "May I, then?"—gratefully.

"I command it!"

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Wasn't it fine to be ordered about in this fashion? If only the train might go on and on and on, thousands of miles! He applied a match to the end of his cigar and leaned back against the cushion.

"Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning. I'm not one of those novel readers who open a book at random. I do not appreciate effects till I have found out the causes. I want to know everything about you, for you interest me."

He began. He told her that he was a German by birth and blood. He had been born either in Germany or in Austria, he did not know which. He had been found in Tyrol, in a railway station. A guard had first picked him up, then a kind-hearted man named Scharfenstein had taken him in charge, advertised for his parents and, hearing nothing, had taken him to America with him.

"If they catch you," she interrupted, "do not under any consideration let them know that you were not born in the United States. Your friend the American consul could do nothing for you then."

"Trust me to keep silent, then." He contin-

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ued: "I have lived a part of my life on the great plains; have ridden horses for days and days at a time. As a deputy sheriff I have arrested desperadoes, have shot and been shot at. Then I went East and entered a great college; went in for athletics, and wore my first dress-suit. Then my foster-parent died, leaving me his fortune. And as I am frugal, possibly because of my German origin, I have more money than I know what to do with." He ceased.

"Go on," she urged.

"When the Spanish War broke out I entered a cavalry regiment as a trooper. I won rank, but surrendered it after the battle of Santiago. And now there are but two things in the world I desire to complete my happiness. I want to know who I am."

"And the other thing?"

"The other thing? I can't tell *you* that!"—hurriedly.

"Ah, I believe I know. You have left some sweetheart back in America." All her interest in his narrative took a strange and unaccountable slump.

"No; I have often admired women, but I have

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left no sweetheart back in America. If I had I should now feel very uncomfortable."

Somehow she couldn't meet his eyes. She recognized, with vague anger, that she was glad that he had no sweetheart. Ah, well, nobody could rob her of her right to dream, and this was a very pleasant dream.

"The train is slowing down," he said suddenly.

"We are approaching the frontier." She shaded her eyes and searched the speeding blackness outside.

"How far is it to the capital?" he asked.

"It lies two miles beyond the frontier."

Silence fell upon them, and at length the train stopped with a jerk. In what seemed to them an incredibly short time a guard unlocked the door. He peered in.

"Here they are, sure enough, your Excellency!" addressing some one in the dark beyond.

An officer from the military household of the Prince of Doppelkinn was instantly framed in the doorway. The girl tried to lower her veil; too late.

"I am sorry to annoy your Highness," he began, "but the grand duke's orders are that you

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shall follow me to the castle. Lieutenant, bring two men to tie this fellow's hands,"—nodding toward Scharfenstein.

Max stared dumbly at the girl. All the world seemed to have slipped from under his feet.

"Forgive me!" she said, low but impulsively.

"What does it mean?" His heart was very heavy.

"I am the Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit, and your entering this carriage has proved the greatest possible misfortune to you."

He stared helplessly — And everything had been going along so nicely — the dinner he had planned in Dresden, and all that!

"And they believe," the girl went on, "that I have eloped with you to avoid marrying the prince." She turned to the officer in the doorway. "Colonel, on the word of a princess, this gentleman is in no wise concerned. I ran away alone."

Max breathed easier.

"I should be most happy to believe your Highness, but you will honor my strict observance of orders." He passed a telegram to her.

Search train for Doppelkinn. Princess has

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eloped. Arrest and hold pair till I arrive on special engine.

Barscheit.

The telegraph is the true arm of the police. The princess sighed pathetically. It was all over.

"Your passports," said the colonel to Max.

Max surrendered his papers. "You need not tie my hands," he said calmly. "I will come peaceably."

The colonel looked inquiringly at the princess.

"He will do as he says."

"Very good. I should regret to shoot him upon so short an acquaintance." The colonel beckoned for them to step forth. "Everything is prepared. There is a carriage for the convenience of your Highness; Herr Ellis shall ride horse-back with the troop."

Max often wondered why he did not make a dash for it, or a running fight. What he had gone through that night was worth a good fight.

"Good-by," said the princess, holding out her hand.

Scharfenstein gravely bent his head and kissed it.

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"Good-by, Prince Charming!" she whispered, so softly that Max scarcely heard her.

Then she entered the closed carriage and was driven up the dark, tree-enshrouded road that led to the Castle of Doppelkinn.

"What are you going to do with me?" Max asked, as he gathered up the reins of his mount.

"That we shall discuss later. Like as not something very unpleasant. For one thing you are passing under a forged passport. You are *not* an American, no matter how well you may speak that language. You are a German."

"There are Germans in the United States, born and bred there, who speak German tolerably well," replied Max easily. He was wondering if it would not be a good scheme to tell a straightforward story and ask to be returned to Barscheit. But that would probably appeal to the officer that he was a coward and was trying to lay the blame on the princess.

"I do not say that I can prove it," went on the colonel; "I simply affirm that you are a German, even to the marrow."

"You have the advantage of the discussion." No; he would confess nothing. If he did he might

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never see the princess again. . . . The princess! As far away as yonder stars! It was truly a very disappointing world to live in.

“Now, then, forward!” cried the colonel to his men, and they set off at a sharp trot.

From time to time, as a sudden twist in the road broke the straight line, Max could see the careening lights of the princess' carriage. A princess! And he was a man without a country or a name!

X

The castle of the prince of Doppelkinn rested in the very heart of the celebrated vineyards. Like all German castles I ever saw or heard of, it was a relic of the Middle Ages, with many a crumbling, useless tower and battlement. It stood on the south side of a rugged hill which was gashed by a narrow but turbulent stream, in which lurked the rainbow trout that lured the lazy man from his labors afield. (And who among us shall cast a stone at the lazy man? Not I!) If you are fortunate enough to run about Europe next year, as like as not you will be mailing home the "Doppelkinn" post-card.

More than once I have wandered about the castle's interior, cavernous and musty, strolled through its galleries of ancient armor, searched its dungeon-keeps, or loitered to soliloquize in the gloomy judgment chamber. How time wars upon custom! In olden times they created pain; now they strive to subdue it.

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I might go into a detailed history of the Doppelkinns, only it would be absurd and unnecessary, since it would be inappreciable under the name of Doppelkinn, which happens to be, as doubtless you have already surmised, a name of mine own invention. I could likewise tell you how the ancient dukes of Barscheit fought off the insidious flattery of Napoleon, only it is a far interest, and Barscheit is simply a characteristic, not a name. Some day I may again seek a diplomatic mission, and what government would have for its representative a teller of tales out of school?

It was, then, to continue the fortunes and misfortunes of Max Scharfenstein, close to midnight when the cavalcade crossed the old moat-bridge, which hadn't moved on its hinges within a hundred years. They were not entering by the formal way, which was a flower-bedded, terraced road. It was the rear entrance. The iron doors swung outward with a plaintive moaning, like that of a man roused out of his sleep, and Max found himself in an ancient guard-room, now used as a kind of secondary stable. The men dismounted.

"This way, Herr Ellis," said the colonel, with

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a mocking bow. He pointed toward a broad stone staircase.

"All I ask," said Max, "is a fair chance to explain my presence here."

"All in due time. Forward! The prince is waiting, and his temper may not be as smooth as usual."

With two troopers in front of him and two behind, Max climbed the steps readily enough. They wouldn't dare kill him, whatever they did. He tried to imagine himself the hero of some Scott or Dumas tale, with a grim cardinal somewhere above, and oubliettes and torture chambers besetting his path. But the absurdity of his imagination, so thoroughly Americanized, evoked a ringing laughter. The troopers eyed him curiously. He might laugh later, but it was scarcely probable. A tramp through a dark corridor and they came to the west wing of the castle. It was here that the old prince lived, comfortably and luxuriously enough, you may take my word for it.

A door opened, flooding the corridor with light. Max felt himself gently pushed over the threshold. He stood in the great living-room of the modern Doppelkinns. The first person he saw was the

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princess. She sat on an oriental divan. Her hands were folded; she sat very erect; her chin was tilted ominously; there was so little expression on her pale face that she might have been an incomplete statue. But Max was almost certain that there was just the faintest flicker of a smile in her eyes as she saw him enter. Glorious eyes! (It is a bad sign when a man begins to use the superlative adjectives!)

The other occupant of the room was an old man, fat and bald, with a nose like a russet pear. He was stalking — if it is possible for a short man to stalk — up and down the length of the room, and, judging from the sonorous, rumbling sound, was communing half-aloud. Betweenwhiles he was rubbing his tender nose, carefully and lovingly. When a man's nose resembles a russet pear it generally *is* tender. Whoever he was, Max saw that he was vastly agitated about something.

This old gentleman was (or supposed he was) the last of his line, the Prince of Doppelkinn, famous for his wines and his love of them. There was, so his subjects said, but one tender spot in the heart of this old man, and that was the memory of the wife of his youth. (How the years, the

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good and bad, crowd behind us, pressing us on and on!) However, there was always surcease in the cellars — that is, the Doppelkinn cellars.

“Ha!” he roared as he saw the blinking Max. “So this is the fellow!” He made an eloquent gesture. “Your Highness must be complimented upon your good taste. The fellow isn’t bad-looking.”

“When you listen to reason, Prince,” replied the girl calmly, “you will apologize to the gentleman and give him his liberty.”

“Oh, he is a gentleman, is he?”

“You might learn from him many of the common rules of courtesy,”—tranquilly.

“Who the devil are you?” the prince demanded of Max.

“I should be afraid to tell you. I hold that I am Max Scharfenstein, but the colonel here declares that my name is Ellis. Who are you?” Max wasn’t the least bit frightened. These were not feudal times.

The prince stared at him. The insolent puppy!

“I am the prince.”

“Ah, your serene Highness,”—began Max, bowing.

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"I am not called 'serene',"—rudely. "The grand duke is 'serene.'"

"Permit me to doubt that," interposed the girl, smiling.

Max laughed aloud, which didn't improve his difficulties any.

"I have asked you who you are!" bawled the prince, his nose turning purple.

"My name is Max Scharfenstein. I am an American. If you will wire the American consulate at Barscheit, you will learn that I have spoken the truth. All this is a mistake. The princess did *not* elope with me."

"His papers give the name of Ellis," said the colonel, touching his cap.

"Humph! We'll soon find out who he is and what may be done with him. I'll wait for the duke. Take him into the library and lock the door. It's a hundred feet out of the window, and if he wants to break his neck, he may do so. It will save us so much trouble. Take him away! take him away!" his rage boiling to the surface.

The princess shrugged.

"I can't talk to you either," said the prince,

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turning his glowering eyes upon the girl. "I can't trust myself."

"Oh, do not mind me. I understand that your command of expletives is rather original. Go on; it will be my only opportunity." The princess rocked backward and forward on the divan. Wasn't it funny!

"Lord help me, and I was perfectly willing to marry this girl!" The prince suddenly calmed down. "What have I ever done to offend you?"

"Nothing," she was forced to admit.

"I was lonely. I wanted youth about. I wanted to hear laughter that came from the heart and not from the mind. I do not see where I am to be blamed. The duke suggested you to me; I believed you to be willing. Why did you not say to me that I was not agreeable? It would have simplified everything."

"I am sorry," she said contritely. When he spoke like this he wasn't so unlovable.

"People say," he went on, "that I spend most of my time in my wine-cellars. Well,"—defiantly,—“what else is there for me to do? I am alone.” Max came within his range of vision. "Take him away, I tell you!"

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And the colonel hustled Max into the library.

"Don't try the window," he warned, but with rather a pleasant smile. He was only two or three years older than Max. "If you do, you'll break your neck."

"I promise not to try," replied Max. "My neck will serve me many years yet."

"It will not if you have the habit of running away with persons above you in quality. Actions like that are not permissible in Europe." The colonel spoke rather grimly, for all his smile.

The door slammed, there was a grinding of the key in the lock, and Max was alone.

The library at Doppelkinn was all the name implied. The cases were low and ran around the room, and were filled with romance, history, biography, and even poetry. The great circular reading-table was littered with new books, periodicals and illustrated weeklies. Once Doppelkinn had been threatened with a literary turn of mind, but a bad vintage coming along at the same time had effected a permanent cure.

Max slid into a chair and took up a paper, turning the pages at random.—What was the matter

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with the room? Certainly it was not close, nor damp, nor chill. What was it? He let the paper fall to the floor, and his eyes roved from one object to another.— Where had he seen that Chinese mask before, and that great silver-faced clock? Somehow, mysterious and strange as it seemed, all this was vaguely familiar to him. Doubtless he had seen a picture of the room somewhere. He rose and wandered about.

In one corner of the bookshelves stood a pile of boy's books and some broken toys with the dust of ages upon them. He picked up a row of painted soldiers, and balanced them thoughtfully on his hand. Then he looked into one of the picture-books. It was a Santa Claus story; some of the pictures were torn and some stuck together, a reminder of sticky, candied hands. He gently replaced the book and the toys, and stared absently into space. How long he stood that way he did not recollect, but he was finally aroused by the sound of slamming doors and new voices. He returned to his chair and waited for the dénouement, which the marrow in his bones told him was about to approach.

It seemed incredible that he, of all persons,

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should be plucked out of the practical ways of men and thrust into the unreal fantasies of romance. A hubbub in a restaurant, a headlong dash into a carriage compartment, a long ride with a princess, and all within three short hours! It was like some weird dream. And how the deuce would it end?

He gazed at the toys again.

And then the door opened and he was told to come out. The grand duke had arrived.

"This will be the final round-up," he laughed quietly, his thought whimsically traveling back to the great plains and the long rides under the starry night.

XI

The Grand Duke of Barscheit was tall and angular and weather-beaten, and the whites of his eyes bespoke a constitution as sound and hard as his common sense. As Max entered he was standing at the side of Doppelkinn.

"There he is!" shouted the prince. "Do *you* know who he is?"

The duke took a rapid inventory. "Never set eyes upon him before." The duke then addressed her Highness. "Hildegarde, who is this fellow? No evasions; I want the truth. I have, in the main, found you truthful."

"I know nothing of him at all," said the princess curtly.

Max wondered where the chill in the room came from.

"He says that his name is Scharfenstein," continued the princess, "and he has proved himself to be a courteous gentleman."

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Max found that the room wasn't so chill as it might have been.

"Yet you eloped with him, and were on the way to Dresden," suggested the duke pointedly.

The princess faced them all proudly. "I eloped with no man. That was simply a little prevarication to worry you, my uncle, after the manner in which you have worried me. I was on my way to Dresden, it is true, but only to hide with my old governess. This gentleman jumped into my compartment as the train drew out of the station."

"But you *knew* him!" bawled the prince, waving his arms.

"Do you know him?" asked the duke coldly.

"I met him out riding. He addressed me, and I replied out of common politeness,"—with a side-long glance at Max, who stood with folded arms, watching her gravely.

The duke threw his hands above his head as if to call Heaven to witness that he was a very much wronged man.

"Arnheim," he said to the young colonel, "go at once for a priest."

"A priest!" echoed the prince.

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"Yes; the girl shall marry you to-night," declared his serene Highness.

"Not if I live to be a thousand!" Doppelkinn struck the table with his fist.

The girl smiled at Max.

"What?" cried the duke, all the coldness gone from his tones. "You refuse?" He was thunderstruck.

"Refuse? Of course I refuse!" And the prince thumped the table again. "What do you think I am in my old age,—an ass? If you have any fillies to break, use your own pastures. I'm a vintner." He banged the table yet again. "Why, I wouldn't marry the Princess Hildegarde if she was the last woman on earth!"

"Thank you!" said the princess sweetly.

"You're welcome," said the prince.

"Silence!" bellowed the duke. "Doppelkinn, take care; this is an affront, not one to be lightly ignored. It is international news that you are to wed my niece."

"To-morrow it will be international news that I'm *not*!" The emphasis this time threatened to crack the table-leaf. "I'm not going to risk my

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liberty with a girl who has no more sense of dignity than she has."

"It is very kind of you," murmured the princess.

"She'd make a fine wife," went on the prince, ignoring the interruption. "No, a thousand times no! Take her away — life's too short; take her away! Let her marry the fellow; he's young and may get over it."

The duke was furious. He looked around for something to strike, and nothing but the table being convenient, he smashed a leaf and sent a vase clattering to the floor. He was stronger than the prince, otherwise there wouldn't have been a table to thwack.

"That's right; go on! Break all the furniture, if it will do you any good; but mark me, you'll foot the bill." The prince began to dance around. "I will not marry the girl. That's as final as I can make it. The sooner you calm down the better."

How the girl's eyes sparkled! She was free. The odious alliance would not take place.

"Who is that?"

Everybody turned and looked at Max. His arm

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was leveled in the direction of a fine portrait in oil which hung suspended over the fireplace. Max was very pale.

"What's that to you?" snarled the prince. He was what we Yankees call "hopping mad." The vase was worth a hundred crowns, and he never could find a leaf to replace the one just broken.

"I believe I have a right to know who that woman is up there." Max spoke quietly. As a matter of fact he was too weak to speak otherwise.

"A right to know? What do you mean?" demanded the prince fiercely. "It is my wife."

With trembling fingers Max produced his locket.

"Will you look at this?" he asked in a voice that was a bit shaky.

The prince stepped forward and jerked the locket from Max's hand. But the moment he saw the contents his jaw fell and he rocked on his heels unsteadily and staggered back toward the duke for support.

"What's the matter, Prince?" asked the duke anxiously. After all Doppelkinn was an old crony, and mayhap he had been harsh with him.

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"Where did you get that?" asked the prince hoarsely.

"I have always worn it," answered Max. "The chain that went with it originally will no longer fit my neck."

"Arnheim! . . . Duke! . . . Come and look at this!"—feebly.

"Good Heaven!" cried the duke.

"It is the princess!" said Arnheim in awed tones.

"Where did you get it?" demanded the prince again.

"I was found with it around my neck."

"Duke, what do you think?" asked the agitated prince.

"What do I think?"

"Yes. This was around my son's neck the day he was lost. If this should be! . . . If it were possible!"

"What?" The duke looked from the prince to the man who had worn the locket. Certainly there wasn't any sign of likeness. But when he looked at the portrait on the wall and then at Max doubt grew in his eyes. They were somewhat alike. He plucked nervously at his beard.

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"Prince," said Max, "before Heaven I believe that I may be . . . your son!"

"My son!"

By this time they were all tremendously excited and agitated and white; all save the princess, who was gazing at Max with sudden gladness in her eyes, while over her cheeks there stole the phantom of a rose. If it were true!

"Let me tell you my story," said Max. (It is not necessary for me to repeat it.)

The prince turned helplessly toward the duke, but the duke was equally dazed.

"But we can't accept just a story as proof," the duke said. "It isn't as if he were one of the people. It wouldn't matter then. But it's a future prince. Let us go slow."

"Yes, let us go slow," repeated the prince, brushing his damp forehead.

"Wait a moment!" said Colonel Arnheim, stepping forward. "Only one thing will prove his identity to me; not all the papers in the world can do it."

"What do you know?" cried the prince, bewildered.

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"Something I have not dared tell till this moment,"— miserably.

"Curse it, you are keeping us waiting!" The duke kicked about the shattered bits of porcelain.

"I used to play with the — the young prince," began Arnheim. "Your Highness will recollect that I did." Arnheim went over to Max. "Take off your coat." Max did so, wondering. "Roll up your sleeve." Again Max obeyed, and his wonder grew. "See!" cried the colonel in a high, unnatural voice, due to his unusual excitement. "Oh, there can be no doubt! It is your son!"

The duke and the prince bumped against each other in their mad rush to inspect Max's arm. Arnheim's finger rested upon the peculiar scar I have mentioned.

"Lord help us, it's your wine-case brand!" gasped the duke.

"My wine case!" The prince was almost on the verge of tears.

The girl sat perfectly quiet.

"Explain, explain!" said Max.

"Yes, yes! How did this come? — put there?" spluttered the prince.

"Your Highness, we — your son — we were

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playing in the wine-cellars that day," stammered the unhappy Arnheim. "I saw . . . the hot iron . . . I was a boy of no more than five . . . I branded the prince on the arm. He cried so that I was frightened and ran and hid. When I went to look for him he was gone. Oh, I know; it is your son."

"I'll take your word for it, Colonel!" cried the prince. "I said from the first that he wasn't bad-looking. Didn't I, Princess?" He then turned embarrassedly toward Max and timidly held out his hand. That was as near sentiment as ever the father and the son came, but it was genuine. "Ho, steward! Hans, you rascal, where are you?"

The steward presently entered, shading his eyes.

"Your Highness called?"

"That I did. That's Max come home!"

"Little Max?"

"Little Max. Now, candles, and march yourself to the packing-cellars. Off with you!" The happy old man slapped the duke on the shoulder.

"I've an idea, Josef."

"What is it?" asked the duke, also very well pleased with events.

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"I'll tell you all about it when we get into the cellar." But the nod toward the girl and the nod toward Max was a liberal education.

"I am pardoned?" said Arnheim.

"Pardoned? My boy, if I had an army I would make you a general!" roared the prince. "Come along, Josef. And you, Arnheim! You troopers, out of here, every one of you, and leave these two young persons alone!"

And out of the various doors the little company departed, leaving the princess and Max alone.

Ah, how everything was changed! thought Max, as he let down his sleeve and buttoned his cuff. A prince! He was a prince; he, Max Scharfenstein, cow-boy, quarter-back, trooper, doctor, was a prince! If it was a dream, he was going to box the ears of the bell-boy who woke him up. But it wasn't a dream; he knew it wasn't. The girl yonder didn't dissolve into mist and disappear; she was living, living. He had now the right to love any one he chose, and he *did* choose to love this beautiful girl, who, with lowered eyes, was nervously plucking the ends of the pillow tassel. It was all changed for her, too.

"Princess!" he said a bit brokenly.

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"I am called Gretchen by my friends,"—with a boldness that only half-disguised her real timidity. What would he do, this big, handsome fellow, who had turned out to be a prince, fairy-tale wise?

"Gretchen? I like that better than Hildergarde; it is less formal. Well, then, Gretchen, I can't explain it, but this new order of things has given me a tremendous backbone." He crossed the room to her side. "You will not wed my — my father?"

"Never in all this world!"—slipping around the table, her eyes dim like the bloom on the grape. She ought not to be afraid of him, but she was.

"But I —"

"You have known me only four days," she whispered faintly. "You can not know your mind."

"Oh, when one is a prince,"—laughing,— "it takes no time at all. I love you. I knew it was going to be when you looked around in old Bauer's smithy."

"Did I look around?"—innocently.

"You certainly did, for I looked around and saw you."

They paused. (There is no pastime quite like it.)

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"But they say that I am wild like a young horse." (Love is always finding some argument which he wishes to have knocked under.)

"Not to me,"—ardently. "You may ride a bicycle every day, if you wish."

"I'd rather have an automobile,"—drolly.

"An airship, if money will buy it!"

"They say — my uncle says — that I am not capable of loving anything."

"What do I care what they say? Will you be my wife?"

"Give me a week to think it over."

"No."

(She liked that!)

"A day, then?"

"Not an hour!"

(She liked this still better!)

"Oh!"

"Not half an hour!"

"This is almost as bad as the duke; you are forcing me."

"If you do not answer yes or no at once, I'll go back to Barscheit and trounce that fellow who struck me. I can do it now."

"Well — but only four days —"

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“Hours! Think of riding together for ever!”
— joyously taking a step nearer.

“I dare not think of it. It is all so like a dream. . . . Oh!” bursting into tears (what unaccountable beings women are!)— “if you do *not* love me!”

“Don’t I, though!”

Then he started around the table in pursuit of her, in all directions, while, after the manner of her kind, she balked him, rosily, star-eyed. They laughed; and when two young people laugh it is a sign that all goes well with the world. He never would tell just how long it took him to catch her, nor would he tell me what he did when he caught her. Neither would I, had I been in his place!

“Here’s!” said the prince.

“It’s a great world,” added the duke.

“For surprises,” supplemented the prince.

“Ho, Hans! A fresh candle!”

And the story goes that his serene Highness of Barscheit and his Highness of Doppelkinn were found peacefully asleep in the cellars, long after the sun had rolled over the blue Carpathians.







